



# THOSE WILD WEST INDIES

EDMUND S. WHITMAN

*With 35 Illustrations*

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TO  
THOSE GALLANT FELLOW-MEMBERS  
OF FAMOUS OLD '299'  
WHOSE ZEST FOR LIFE, WHOSE PROFOUND  
DISREGARD FOR CONVENTION  
AND EAGERNESS FOR THE SEA, SCOTCH AND SHAMBLES  
KEPT THEIR COLLECTIVE BLOOD-STREAM FIRED  
LIKE A BEACON THAT NOW CAN  
NEVER FADE !





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## *Fade-In*

**T**HIS is to be an adventure book ; intimate, accurate, and as entertaining as fifteen years of life and travel along the lanes of the Caribbean can make it. I shall try to avoid the impossibles and improbables and to discuss those aspects of Central America and the West Indies that *you* might conceivably experience. But that does not imply sugar-coated travel fare. This book is for those of age who can take theirs straight. The mentally adolescent will spare themselves many's the disapproving 'Tsch-tsch' by not straying farther afield than this paragraph (crafty, eh ? who, amongst us, will abide by that ?).

The locale will be Central America and the important West Indian islands of Jamaica, Haiti, and Cuba as well as certain of the lesser known but even more fascinating ones such as the San Blas group off Panama and Hog Island, Roatan and Utila in the great bay of Honduras. Remember, these discursions into the archæology, history, ethnology, flora, and fauna of this region will be strictly informal—drawn from the reading, exploration, and actual excitements that have actually crossed my own screen. Tropical adventures that have passed in review before my mental Camera Eye are about to be brought into focus for you to decide whether you'd like to absorb a bit of personalized tropical lore.

That means there'll be no attempt to include prevailing hotel rates or currency exchange, intimate tips on lush spots dear to the heart of the travel public or any glossary of common terms in French or Spanish required to order drinks, direct taxicabs, hire mules, or purchase machetes (manufactured in Connecticut). There'll be no injection of foreign words or phrases into the text simply to lend 'colour' (synonym for an author's propensity to show off); if and when you en-



counter such, it's because there's nothing in English to fit the pattern. There'll be little about the moon-drenched palms, crumbling cathedrals, flaming bougainvillea, Havana's Capitolio, or the million dollar opera house in San José, Costa Rica . . . you know what I mean.

But if you're interested in the giant turtles that flap their flukes in the estuaries of Puerto Limon or the buzzards patiently roosting on the out-houses of Puerto Barrios, waiting for the morning slaughter to end—or in the pelicans that drift in echelon formation over the sun-glazed waters of stagnant lagoons and how they are caught by the little native boys, or in the hilarious, brown babies, banana-bellied, crowing on the thresholds of thatched huts and why—then maybe you will care to read on.

There will be stories of the slatternly girls in sleazy satin dresses, whose rolled stockings bulge unwholesomely with crumpled dollar bills as they sprawl around gin- and cigarette-scarred tables in garish *cantinas* along the waterfront. There will be a lot about the decay, the noxious odours, the cockroaches and other vermin with their lilting antennæ which they wiggle at you so provocatively from every sugar bowl. There will be filth and laughter, intrigue and lassitude—all inextricably wrapped up like a tortilla in a banana leaf and baked to a crisp beneath the coppery tropic sun. There will be stories about the deep bowing, the involved social punctilio, the nonsensical methods of doing business, the drinking, courting, singing, fighting, merrymaking, sport, and dissipations of the whites and the browns of tropical America.

Against this hectic activity I shall try to present the incredible beauty of the vegetation at dawn, the jungle rivers that wind like silver ribbons through towering trees whose branches flash with brilliantly coloured birds and scrofulous, scratching monks. There will be all of this because these are the charming and enlightening reflections of the tropics—charming because the externals are true pictures—enlightening because people who live along the Caribbean are utterly unlike the interpretations handed down to us in the shape of popular

travel literature and that engaging, but none too reliable, medium—Hollywood.

Spin the globe then, fellow travellers, and as that region between the southernmost tip of Florida and the northernmost coast of South America swings across the vision, gird your loins, shed your balbriggans, wind up your cameras, and fade-in on those Wild West Indies !



BOOK ONE

Dominant Characteristics



## Heat Treatment

THEY had a course in heat treatment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge which is one of the reasons why I left that famous seat of learning and decided to become a tropical banana herder. That was in the spring of 1921 and if I had known what the next seventeen years were to hold for me perhaps I wouldn't have exposed myself to a new type of heat treatment that made the first one look no more formidable than two cigarettes in the dark !

Heat ! Within twenty-four hours of the time that the trim banana boat swung south past Cape Hatteras until the present moment, when I sit in a stinking *cantina* on the waterfront of Port au Prince, Haiti, writing pencilled notes that are obliterated by the perspiration almost as soon as they hit the page, heat has ever been the predominant factor in my life in tropical America.

It was hot enough at sea, but that was a veritable excursion into the Elysian waterways with the celestial seaweed in my hair compared to what happened in the fifteen minutes spent on the poop-deck of an open lighter, being transferred from the ship anchored in Santiago de Cuba's gorgeous harbour to the mainland of that rum-and-roughrider-famed city ! The time must have been about two in the afternoon and the water was an infinite sheet of molten glass reflecting the copper, brass, and blood of an utterly merciless sun. If there was any breath of air at all it seemed to come up from the sea—a steamy vapour redolent of baked crustacea which swept up into the face and nostrils at the same instant that the sun cracked down on the base of the brain. Waves of heat that could almost be coiled into a rope, undulated before the

vision, glazing the eyeballs, wilting the knee-caps of anyone who dared to expose himself. And don't get the impression that I was standing there like a model in a bathing-suit advertisement—school of the big bronze chest, bare torso, and bulging muscles, with nothing on but a pair of short pants. I wasn't. I was fully dressed and properly dressed for the tropics in so far as that is possible. The fact is that proper dress for such a situation is impossible. No white man has any business standing on the open deck of a launch in Santiago harbour at 2 p.m. No white man has any business being at large in such heat.

Well, what would *you* have done under those conditions? That's what I did as soon as I got ashore and could find a place—and I knew that *cerveza* was the Spanish for beer. That beer was returned promptly by a million astonished and indignant pores as well as my one impulsive alimentary canal which really wasn't on speaking terms with its master during those first days of tropical adjustment.

Nevertheless, the responsibility of an ascent up San Juan Hill and through El Caney lay before me. Here was ground hallowed by the footsteps of Colonel Theodore Roosevelt and his right bower, Leonard Wood. I had been brought up under the influence of the Cuban battle manoeuvres of 1898 with considerable care inasmuch as my father at that time was a Lieutenant of Cavalry in that region. Also I was interested in Leonard Wood's later work of bringing some measure of cleanliness to the city. The venerable fathers of Santiago, up to that time, had a simple sanitation idea about their town—an idea which was still functioning almost thirty years after the battle of San Juan Hill. Here's the way it worked: the city is built on a precipitous mountain-side that tumbles into the sea. Utilizing the law of gravitation, it was apparent that the sensible thing to do was to start building at the top and work down. Obviously, the higher points on the mountain represented the more desirable sites. As additional dwellers came in, they had to construct farther down and thereby participate in and contribute to the flow of sewage on its way to the sea. This was all demonstrated very clearly to me as I

scrambled laboriously up that mountain-side under the implacable blast of the sun. At one time I stepped off the pavement into the gutter. My shoes were soled with *crêpe* rubber and they skated through the slime in such an alarming fashion that I came very close to making a much more personal investigation of the situation than I cared to. Anyway, I finally surmounted the crest of the city and stood dripping under the cruel beat of the heat, surveying the city as it lay sprawled out below me with its tiled roofs and multi-coloured adobe houses. I realized that San Juan Hill was still several miles away, but my stubborn New England conscience told me that if my father and his associates could climb those hills and fight I should certainly be able to continue my tourist activities on foot. I was ready to buckle—buckle down the hill and back to a shower aboard ship. But there was my conscience in the way and there was San Juan Hill in the distance.

Fortunately there came into my life at that moment the beautiful character Juan Escobar Ybanks; complexion by the Pittsburgh Coal Company: teeth by courtesy of Steinway: accent, outskirts-of-Oxford by the grace of British colonial rule: disposition and perspiration by God! Oh, yes, and a 1917 Buick by the local Ford used-car department.

"Take you wear dey win de whar!"

"I beg your pardon?"

He said it again, this time removing his battered straw tile and putting up his fists in an effort to explain what he had in mind.

"How much?" I asked him wearily as I climbed into the creaking tonneau. The car had a top, by the way, but that in no manner interfered with the sun's work on the dust-dry, brittle, and cracked leather upholstery. This I discovered as soon as I sat down.

It doesn't matter how much—I don't remember anyway. But he got me to the place wear dey win de whar and I went through the usual patriotic formalities before the monuments and relics of San Juan Hill. It was so hot on the summit that the ground and the grass and those hardy perennial flowers that persist in blooming in the tropics despite all old Sol can turn on—all were the same colour—and so were the cannons



which baked placidly in the blaze of light as only sleeping crocodiles could do. Yes, everything was the colour and temperature of a thin slice of sugar-glazed sweet potato boiling in its own juice.

Had enough yet? This is, as the genial Captain of the Showboat assures us: "on-lee thee bee-ginning!" Why, the day I landed in Belize, British Honduras, I went through experiences that made me look back on Santiago as an interlude in a mountain resort in the Adirondacks. All the other passengers were old-timers who panted patiently in their shaded steamer chairs, but I had not taken my full course in heat treatment at that time, so I persisted in going ashore with the bar-tender, who only went because he had to replenish his supply of whisky and had a British port in which to do it.

The jetty was dancing crazily as we bumped the dinghy's nose against her creaking piles. A thin and insipid surf foamed against the copper beach—the warm water hissing at the point of contact. I noticed thousands of tiny sand crabs popping about with their antennae wildly waving. I knew then how some starved soul, in desperation, had eaten one and thus unwittingly discovered broiled live lobsters!

I had all afternoon in which to inspect the town. It was roughly divided into three sections—the Red Light district, the business district, and the substantial residential community of the British. Lurking in the shadows of the palm trees near by was the usual assortment of waterfront life—the out-and-out beggars and the counterpart of those curious specimens we have in our own country who persist in lolling around in front of the railway station or drug store rather than go home. One was different—a barefoot youngster of Carib descent who spoke good English engagingly and who had an open, attractive candour about him. He attached himself to my hand as a cockle-burr might to my trouser leg—and he became my guide.

"Only 'arf-crown, Cap'n. . . . They talk English, y'know. . . . Best chippies on the coast, rheally." The lad's diction and *naïveté* were astonishing. He reminded me somehow of

Kim. Nor was he to be put aside in his insistence that the ladies be the first number on the programme.

"Women," I said portentously, "do not appeal to me under the present climatic conditions." I scooped a crooked fingerful of perspiration from my brow to illustrate what I meant. "You're too young to visualize the implications of my remark, but when I want a Turkish bath I'll let you know."

He grinned, understanding nothing whatsoever that I had said.

"Very fine, y'know," he persisted.

"We're not going," I said shortly. "By the way—what do you get out of it?"

"Ten per cent," he replied promptly.

I tossed him a shilling. "That's better than you could do even if I stayed over there all afternoon—that is, at the current rate of exchange. Pipe down on the subject of the ladies and conduct me to the nearest emporium where the Ten Commandments still prevail, yet a man can quench his thirst."

How that boy could scrunch along through the sun-glazed pebbles and ashy clinkers in that pitiless sun was more than I could understand. I mentioned this to him and suggested that he might get better results if he were to walk in the grass alongside the narrow walk which followed the line of the beach toward the residential section.

"No, no, Cap'n." He shook a small black finger at me. "Bad business, that. I show you!"

Before I knew what it was all about he had hopped into the tall grass and was padding along, head down, intently watching his every forward step. Finally he turned his head for a second to call me, at the same time eagerly pointing downward before him.

"Here, sir! I show you. I show you . . ."

There was a shrill scream. The boy leapt clear of the grass and flung himself in the middle of the walk. I rushed up and found him crying brokenly and hugging one bare foot in blood-covered hands.

"Those Goddam crabs," he sobbed. He pointed to the deep shadows at the foot of the coco-nut trees fringing the

walk. Several dark bodies lumbered awkwardly about, scuttling from shadow to shadow, as though lying in wait for succulent bare toes. Land crabs. Some were as large as dinner plates, with giant left claws so highly developed that they had to drag them on the ground, being unable to lift them except in moments of frenzy. A human toe—even one that had never been made tender by a shoe—was no more to one of those crabs than a sprig of privet to a pair of hedge shears.

The boy had not lost his toe, but the crab had inflicted a lacerating cut. Lucky thing, too, for he had long since sacrificed the big toe on his other foot. He was pretty brave about it. I offered to carry him back to the dock but he shook his kinky head and hopped along ahead, muttering and sniffing. At the landing some voodoo first-aid was administered which elicited further shrieks of agony. I paid all charges and tossed the youngster a half-dollar.

It was the same thing in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. All night our steamer had drummed leisurely down the moon-dappled coast and dawn found us entering the fairest harbour imaginable. To the right loomed magnificent mountains, fresh, verdant, sparkling with dew in the early morning sunlight, while behind them the range extended on and on, mists of grey wool creeping disconsolately upward before the premonitory lash of the sun. On the left Cape Three Points was partially obscured by the impalpable sheen of vapour already rising from the glassy sea. Straight ahead the village sprawled out beneath the palms, smoke drifting lazily skyward in thin, grey pencils. Chinese out-houses ineffectually attempted to defile the purity of that sheet of water which extended from our prow to the shore. Leaning over the side of the ship it seemed as though our stem must be cutting through glass; there was not the slightest ripple. As the wine-coloured water fell away on either side it was of so uniform and perfect a pattern that we might have been aboard a painted ship upon a painted ocean or mounted on a museum diorama seemingly in

motion, yet forever immovable. Closer to the shore, the silence of early morning which hung over the bay was disturbed by the distant exhortations of the labourers on the dock, the creaking of pier conveyors, the discordant cries of many sea birds. . . .

By the time the ship had been tied to her berth and the stevedores had come swarming aboard in their banana-stained rags and battered straw hats the dew had long since been brushed from the rose petal. Rose petal? With those vultures hanging hopefully above the slaughter house and perched expectantly in palm trees, their beady black eyes, ever searching for tender little morsels, properly seasoned (say about ten days old)? With nude, bronze men and women splashing through the shallows and flinging their morning's catch of fish on the shore to be promptly disembowelled and left to the mercies of that sun? What chance rose petals there?

By ten the heat waves were dancing crazily over the shore and over the scorched streets. The red tin roofs fairly cracked with heat. The roads were baked to a fine pearl-grey dust which choked the nostrils and caked on face, hands, and arms—not to mention any other portion of the anatomy that was wet and available. How we from the ship survived that stifling, blinding, pulsating procession of hours till the sun pulled its bloody mantle about it and slipped away across the western horizon is more than I know. We panted miserably on the porch of the rickety hotel, consuming warm beer and languidly playing a battered slot machine.

By dusk the cargo discharge was completed and we felt that we could return to the ship in peace. You can imagine how we relished those tiled showers. My skin stung beneath the cool pelt of salt water, but I found that my body was one mass of heat rash. That saline reaction was one of the most enjoyable sensations ever known—comparable only to the vicious pleasure of applying ammonia to a mass of mosquito bites and enjoying the stinging reaction. The ship's doctor (he was relieving the regular ship's medico, and this was his first trip) and I then decided to go to hell-in-a-hand-bawsket and make a night of it. We started with

iced whisky and soda in tall glasses. We broke out our flannels and white shoes, even going in for Panama hats. The doctor was as green as I, you see, and we both felt that we would express our disregard for this horrible, heat-flooded land which had in eight short hours drained our rugged physical equipment of all reserve—a reserve recovered only through the medium of understandable North American plumbing fixtures and clean clothes. We ordered the cold buffet for dinner—and iced tea—glasses of it! We were wringing wet by the time we had stepped down the gangplank.

"What the hell," the doctor grumbled. "No use even trying to be decent down here. Let's go up the track!"

So we drifted along through the star-studded night, chatting with Jamaican negro families huddled in the door-steps of spindle-legged camp-houses, practising our execrable Spanish on native shopkeepers and bar-tenders, drinking warm *crème de menthe*, *kümmel*, *vermouth*, beer . . .

In due course the doctor arrived at the 'Paloma Roja,' a dive that was unquestionably on the wrong side of the track. Here he first ministered to my inevitable gastronomic upheaval and then sought solace in the arms of a dusky beauty, a sloe-eyed Indian full of vitality and throaty laughter on whose dark face with its subcutaneous glow of copper, the paint and powder had caked into a sort of sweaty shellac. . . .

Greytown, perched like an expectant vulture on Nicaragua's southernmost sand spit, is a honey for heat too! Years ago this old English settlement was hot-and-bothered over the likelihood of being the Atlantic terminus of a canal through Nicaragua's inland waterways. Gradually hope vanished—and with hope, most of the inhabitants. To-day Greytown is hot—but nobody bothers!

The wooden houses are rotting in the sunlight, warping in the rain, crumbling and shaken by the wind storms. Gingerbread scrolls, upstairs balconies, and piazzas sag dangerously. Abandoned homes gape at you through windowless, shutterless eyes. Charred ruins bespeak the

desperation of owners who long ago burned their buildings hoping to cash in on the insurance. Streets, once cobbled, are alternately thick with rank grass and scarified by sun-baked ruts. Everywhere the jungle, vegetation, and heat strike viciously at man's feeble effort to preserve the identity of this unhappy, forsaken town. Walls are riotous with creepers, moss, ferns, and orchids. Dangling streamers grope downwards from menacing trees through whose branches parrots, toucans, and macaws scream and chatter.

Quite without warning on the way back to the ship the skies were obscured by thick, scudding clouds which poured pencils of warm water over us as effortlessly as though some giant water sprinkler had been upturned. At once a steamy exudation arose from the rich earth; those same rut-baked streets with their blankets of impalpable oyster-coloured dust were reduced miraculously to swimming expanses of slime. Slime, did you say? Sitting here in a *cantina* at Port au Prince with the sun even more menacingly advanced since I first started pouring out my heart on the subject of tropical heat, I have only to raise my head and blink the sweat out of my eyes to see the finest grade A, extra-special slime conceivable. Right across the street on either side of the railway track (I am still trying to find where that railway goes) is the market, presided over by perhaps a hundred groups of Haitian negresses, all squatting on their heels, their dresses modestly tucked underneath their knees, but with no interest whatsoever as to what exposure may be taking place north of the belt line. Each group is huddled about some amorphous mass of stuff; decayed mangoes and alligator pears, plantains, great piles of congo beans, bread fruit, coco-nuts, butchered cows' heads and red blobs of raw meat completely obscured by the flies. . . . A series of paths wind from group to group, flanked on either side by morasses—piles—of sea green slime. If that excrescence could be barrelled, it should bring a higher figure on the fertilizer market than the choicest guano! Such is its consistency (and you'll pardon me if I keep dwelling on this) that not even the Haitian sun at noon-time can soak it up. All it seems to be able to do is draw the reek out into

the open and push it in our faces. Nobody else seems to mind—but I do, vehemently !

I have just returned from a foot trip throughout the city of Port au Prince. The only really attractive interior that I saw as I plodded through the dusky streets under the quaint old balconies (on which I kept a wary eye, knowing the propensities of the Latins to dispose of their slops over the top) was when I visited the new and magnificent, though garish, cathedral on the heights overlooking the shimmering bay. Nor was it this cathedral that attracted me, although I did wander through its long drawn aisles, inspecting the *bougies* (pitiful lighted tapers set before different shrines by poverty-stricken ardent worshippers) and the inevitable lacquered holy figures and multi-coloured lithographs depicting our Saviour, usually bleeding and almost always in some stage of suffering—why, I'll never know. No—it was not this, but on the downward slope behind the great cathedral that I spied a lichen-covered old temple, walled-in gardens overgrown with rank weeds, paving stones displaced by growing vines, great wooden shutters with hand-made pegs, hanging idly from gaping windows. . . . It was high noon and I could not get in. I could look in, though, and see the broken-down pews huddled forlornly in the middle of the great, dark, mysterious nave. The altar was still there, brave in its gilt and crimson. Some faithful father had recently lighted and placed four white candles on the cool flagstone floor before it. So I stood there with the sun beating down through the grass hat that was no protection at all to me, burning my skin through my shirt, making the blood pulse behind my eyeballs. Oh, if I could only get out of that heat—if I could only open the gate and crawl into that cool, dark interior, just to sit there and meditate, just to kneel before whichever one of the Saints is closest to the natural phenomena and beseech him to do something, for Christ's sake, about the heat !

## *When It Rains It Pours*

THERE are only two seasons in the tropics—wet and dry. When it rains the heavy clouds seem to release water as effortlessly as though it were being poured out of a bucket. The downpour strikes in silver pencils against the mouldy walls of old cathedrals and the regal palms that line the boulevards. Pavements shimmer with it, gutters gurgle with it, ruts baked to metallic hardness melt into pools of copper-coloured mud. Across the plains it comes, sheet upon sheet, turning the *quebradas* into swollen streams that burst their bounds and flood the lowlands. Impalpable screens of water in suspension turn lavender mountain ranges into a uniform oyster colour. Half-formed rainbows strike across the vision flaming like nacre, then are drowned as the sun disappears behind an impregnable wall of cloud, not to reappear for many months.

For hours on end, for days and weeks at a time this pitiless, relentless fall of rain continues. Not a fissure that does not exhale a rich scent of fecundity, not a plant that does not stand swollen with fertility. The sun-glazed land seems to stir underfoot; aroused at last from its sleep it now palpitates with the desire of reproduction. Deep down in the mouldy recesses of the loam, the great heart throbs once more, stirred with a passion liberated by the rain from the sun-baked crust. Now, as everything is unbelievably green and rank, the earth vibrates with desire, offering itself wantonly to the caresses of the sky, insistent, eager, imperious—its pungent exudations heavy with the promise of fruitfulness.

Stand beneath the partial protection of an overhanging palm and listen. Listen to the hiss of the rain as it liberates the eternal renascent germ of life that stirs and struggles in the lubricated loins of the ground beneath you. Sniff the



steamy, oxygenous odour of the aroused soil. This is the tropics. . . .

Sweeping rains come and go across the ruffled surface of the Caribbean Sea. Standing on the bridge deck, perhaps in the sunlight, you see dark blots against the sky, pearl-grey shafts of water cut like knife blades into the leaden deeps, while rain in the moonlight is a symphony threshing sweetly across the sea—a flood of diamonds that strike and dance with silver slippers far, far to the ocean's end.

In Havana you may be motoring along the Malecon in an open car, basking in the wine-clear sunlight, when suddenly storm clouds sweep over the rim of the world and you are soaked before you can get to cover. In Panama it rains one minute and clears the next. Along Central America's heavily wooded littoral where the cane and bananas grow it pours and pours until the riding saddles are green with mould, the mattresses soggy, satchels mildewed, shoes and books curled, and bureau drawers so warped that a blow-torch wouldn't open them.

Man and mule suffer as the dank days wheel by. The strong ones wilt and the weak ones die. Quinine and whisky lash the bloodstream high, but what's the good of medicine when nothing's dry? Water-logged garments against the clammy skin—the wet-rot stench of jungle growth forever in the wind: a drizzle in the morning is a downpour by high noon—is it any wonder a man goes crazy as a loon?

Rain on the roof-tops, rain in the trees. . . . Dampness in the freshets and dampness in the breeze. Rivulets that fill your boots and angle down your back, dripping down the gutter, gleaming on the track. Regiments of pendant drops march along the wire, hang there in suspension—then splash into the mire. Endlessly the raindrops whisper to the creek and the world becomes so soggy, mouldy, slimy that a man could shriek!

## *Viva la Independencia*

ANYBODY who has lived in the tropics has heard some barefoot patriot at one time or another rise on his toes like a fighting cock, swing his battered sombrero in a great arc and pipe in a penetrating falsetto: "*Viva Don Tiburcio Carias! Viva la independencia!*"

If it's not Carias it's Raphael Lopez Gutierrez, Policarpo Bonilla, or some other *politico* dear to the hearts of his countrymen. And such a demonstration on the part of that barefoot zealot means one of two things: either a victory is being celebrated or a challenge flung into the teeth of the enemy.

The first *viva* I heard came up to my bedroom window on the second floor of the railroad station at Tela, Honduras, on a dark night when the wind was sending cloud masses scudding across the moon. There had been no talk of revolution so it was obvious that it must be a challenge. From the window blurred forms could be discerned dodging forward through the coco-nut grove that lay between the house and the sea. The clink of cartridges in bandoliers being jounced against the hips of running men drifted upward. Fifteen minutes later the crackle of sporadic firing up the beach constituted the announcement of the first engagement (that year) between the Reds (Revolutionists) and the Blues (Federalists).

The Reds and the Blues. It sounds like a game. In a way it is a game. Invariably there are two political parties in Latin American government: the Ins and the Outs—those on the side of the constituted government; those on the pay-roll as soldiers, civil service workers, merchants, planters, and others who are content to pay their taxes and their graft in exchange for protection—and those who have not got

their noses in the trough. This may be a harsh summation. There can be no question that idealism and loyalty to a leader burns brightly in certain Latin hearts. Such men are rare, however, and they are emotional rather than intellectual because no matter what individual may be at the head of a government the same policies are pursued.

The Blues in a township are known first by their outspoken attitude toward their leader, and second by any fragment of soiled blue ribbon that they may attach to their person in an hour of crisis. The same goes with the Reds. Generally speaking, when a revolution is being fomented (and when isn't one?) the workers into whose hands will be pressed the rusty muskets when the moment of conscription comes practically always carry a Blue and a Red ribbon—just in case !

It works too. With the U.S.S. *Denver* (flagship of the special service squadron) and the U.S.S. *Billingsley* anchored off the pier, and the Major in charge of the landing party conducting the protective operations of his men from my room, I was able to follow the final pitched battle of the great revolution of 1924. Bullets rattled off the tin roof overhead, and the fighting was so close that when the white flag of surrender finally appeared over the ragged sandbag bulwarks before the Comandancia the Major's glasses revealed the pathetic *opera bouffe* spectacle of many defending soldiers hastily stripping off the tell-tale Blue and, with tremulous fingers, pinning on the victorious Red !

In Honduras—the papa of all revolutionary republics—most of the fighting is done in cities or towns and preferably in 'white sections.' Whether revolutionists or federalists, it must be remembered that the illiterate protagonists are raw-hides at best, in whose breasts flare the primitive lust for blood and loot. They are no more prompted to take up arms in defence of or objection to a censored franchise than were our own soldier boys shedding blood in the Argonne to uphold the honour of Belgian womanhood. What the hell ! They're in there blazing away because they've been lashed

to it by force and alcohol, hoping to God that they won't get plugged, and keeping a weather eye on the next source of loot, when the whistle blows and the game is over. A pet stunt during periods of warfare, is for the commanding officer of any detachment on either side to storm into some quaking Chinese merchant's establishment, or the commissary of some North American corporation, or even a private home of a foreigner, and summarily to impound whatever there may be of food, liquor, stores, arms, or equipment, leaving in exchange a poorly scrawled receipt to be liquidated by a grateful government, provided such a government shall exist when the document is presented for appraisal and payment.

Nor are such violations of property rights entirely restricted to the foreigners. I remember one rainy March in 1924 when the revolutionists had captured all the important ports on the northern coast—and that meant all the rich sources of Custom-house receipts. Radio stations had been taken and all telegraphic communications between the coast and the distant mountain capital, Tegucigalpa, had been severed. There was one decrepit Lincoln Standard aeroplane in Tela at that time, under the control of the company for which I worked. Certain important documents had to be in the hands of our representative in the capital at once, and since no other means existed of reaching Tegucigalpa (there was then, as now, no railway to this tiny mountain city; the only way to get there was by mule through wild country where the bandits freely roamed—or by air), it became my duty to take the trip by plane.

At crack of dawn I slipped out through the mists to the flying field with the big black oilskin package of documents under my arm. The aviator was absolutely trustworthy: he neither smoked nor drank, was an excellent flier and technician, and inspired in the hearts of everybody who came in contact with him a feeling of complete confidence. He was a boy from the great North-West. He was good—he had to be to get that antiquated crate off the ground. It rattled and creaked and the guy wires moaned like an unstrung guitar in the hands of a tuner. Silver cloth patches

on the wings mutely testified to the pot shots that had registered on reconnaissance trips over that turbulent valley.

For fifteen minutes we flew in circles, gaining altitude until we were ready for that drive over the great divide which took us nearly fifteen thousand feet above sea-level. Through rifts in the rising mists I could see the perfection of mile upon mile of neatly planted banana land, vast squares of sugar country, tiny ribbons of silver where the rivers groped their way to the sea. We flashed over roaring waterfalls, deep mysterious gorges, the mighty Cordillera, and finally dropped down into a mountain plateau where the old-world city of Tegucigalpa lay sprawled in the morning sun.

I was arrested the moment I stepped, or rather staggered, out of the plane. It seems that I was the first man to enter Tegucigalpa from the outside world for more than twenty days. The President naturally wanted to know what was going on. Our representative was on hand to relieve me of the mail, but was none too cheerful about what might happen once I disappeared within the gloomy portals of the Presidential Mansion. Stories were being mooted about to the effect that those suspected of being spies or holding out information or sympathizing with the revolutionists were being given 'the business.' This included being hung by the thumbs and other even more delicate portions of the anatomy for indefinite periods of time, application of heat, whipping, thrusting toothpicks under the fingernails, and shackling in irons.

The President's house is one of the most imposing edifices in Tegucigalpa. I entered with the Minister of War and was courteously conducted through various lower chambers, past the great reception room on the ground floor, and up what should have been and was undoubtedly intended to be a fine marble staircase. Actually, the marble never arrived, so the stairs were made of poured cement. The President received me in his study. It was a bare room furnished with wicker, with the Honduran flag in the corner behind the desk and chromos of various patriots hung on the wall. The old gentleman had the diabetes and died, as a matter of

fact, within two weeks of my command performance. He offered me King Bee cigarettes with shaking fingers and treated me with the greatest consideration. He plied me with questions about the conditions on the north coast and I was not happy to be put in the position of having to report the butchery and the carnage inflicted by his enemy and the fact that they had taken practically the entire country. He then sounded me out as to the capacity of that aeroplane. He said it might be necessary for me to return to Tela by a circuitous route and in company with another passenger. He said that he would take care of passport requirements in case this route carried the plane outside of the Republic. That could only mean Guatemala or Mexico as I saw it and the passenger in question was undoubtedly himself. I told him that I would not get in that plane with any other passenger, but that if he wanted to seize it and use it for governmental purposes that was his business and I would remain in the capital.

Upon my dismissal from his presence I managed to tip off the aviator, and before an adequate guard had been posted about the plane we grabbed what mail was ready and jumped off. . . . Never before had I been so thrilled by any sight as when the vista of that infinite fan of azure spread out below me once more and we angled down to the shore of the Caribbean, back in Tela.

Eventually the enemy stormed and took the capital and the new dictator occupied the Presidential Palace. These ruffians rode their mules and horses right into the reception room, the soldiers slept, ate, and performed the necessities of life wherever they chose, ransacking the governmental files, violating valuable documents of State, reducing the beautiful mansion to the status of a pig pen.

Such are the fruits of tropical revolution. Like the wet and dry seasons they are unpredictable, but inevitable. Undoubtedly there's one brewing even as you read these words. Perhaps it will go 'phht' like a damp firework. Perhaps it won't. Who, with a shrug of the shoulders, knows—or cares?

## *Disease—Inside and Outside*

**M**ALARIA is the headline ailment in the tropics. Some forms are malignant—others aren't. The fever responds to proper medical treatment and to-day the American Tropics is being well policed in the great drive to stamp out the anopheles mosquito. Speaking of blowing hot and blowing cold—I know of no better way to learn how terribly hot and how incredibly cold the human body can be than to get yourself a nice shot of malaria. When the fever rages and your blood is on fire, eyeballs glazed, and skin bone dry, it is truly an oven heat that flames through the brain and down the spinal cord. Then comes a profuse perspiration and suddenly, as though an earthquake had struck, the bed shakes and rattles with the ferocity of the chill. There just aren't enough blankets in all the Canadian North-West Mounted Police bunkhouses to keep you warm.

The natives, prior to their unwilling acceptance of modern medical prophylaxes, readily succumbed to this disease. I remember a cook we had whose marrow was full of fever. Periodically it would crop out on her and she would retire to the back steps with a large towel wrapped around her head, there to suffer, alternately burn and freeze, as she mournfully called on her Patron Saints. Fortunately hers was tertian malaria, with periods of comparative relief, at which times we ate. But in general, let the native once become infected with some disorder of an internal nature—influenza, typhoid, tuberculosis, or dysentery—and he promptly gives up the ghost. He quits. He sits down or lies down, spiritless, sick at heart, and prepares to go forward to the fulfilment of his spiritual life.

Not so in the case of external wounds. The greatest individual factor contributing to hospital cases is violence.

And here the courage of the native shines. We had a foreman once who got himself barrellled one pay-day night in company with a friend and on the way back to camp, as they staggered in single file up the path, the friend, who was in the rear, conceived a sudden dislike for the way the leader's head kept bobbing up and down in the moonlight. Consequently he took a pass at it with his machete.

The wounded man with his head half-severed from his shoulders staggered as far as the Overseer's house and collapsed on the steps—but there was no whimpering, no blubbering. He wanted to get sewed up—he wanted to live—he had a job to do on his friend. The staff was in town, hiding out until the pay-day binge was over, so the only person to render aid was the native stockman. He promptly poured half a bottle of iodine into the raw, bleeding cut and then, because authorities frowned upon the discovery of dead bodies on anybody's private property, proceeded to saddle a mule, hoist his countryman into the seat, lead the steed out into the plantation and administer a farewell whack on the animal's rump.

In the morning the riderless mule was placidly grazing in the yard. His haunches and the saddle blanket were dark with blood. Two weeks later the foreman appeared from his mountain camp, apparently as good as new and ready to go back on the job.

It's hard to tell about the brown people. They're small, but they're wiry and they're tough. One cannot help but suspect that their insides must be pretty rotten. Certainly, evidences along the railway track passing the labour camps reflect a high index of dysentery. Certainly there's a lot of venereal disease and bad eyes. But these are about the only outward manifestations of a depleted physical condition. Other than that you can't tell whether your house-boy is suffering with hookworm, pernicious anæmia, or what not. I knew of a general mess being run for white engineers, railway men, architects, and contractors up in the interior of Honduras where the chief cook and bottle-washer was a



nondescript native boy named Porfirio. They found him one day coughing his lungs out over the stove. Up to that moment nobody had the slightest idea that there was anything even mildly wrong with him, let alone an advanced tubercular condition.

And speaking of venereal disease—some of the nationals are pretty sensitive about it. There was the case of a young girl about sixteen who came into the hospital at Tela, Honduras, with something or other the matter with her pipes and she was parked in the third-class ward along with a motley assemblage of gangrene machete cases, yaws, and fever patients. There was a new fresh-faced doctor from Philadelphia on the staff under whose jurisdiction came the third-class ward. Poor Doc spoke horrible Spanish. He knew only about four nouns and one verb, and other than that was addicted to that obnoxious practice of adding an 'a' or an 'o' to the English word he wanted to use, hoping against hope that it would make sense in Spanish.

He came to the bed of the young patient and examined her chart. Evidently the nurse had not recorded all the vital statistics because the doctor found no record of her sputum specimen having been taken. He wanted to save her the embarrassment of going through the formality again, if possible, but didn't know how to ask her if the nurse had taken it. He stuck out his tongue, he gargled in the back of his throat, and finally in desperation he spat on the floor. The poor girl regarded him with growing apprehension and astonishment. All he wanted to know was, what about the sputum? '*Spito*' didn't sound like Spanish, nor did '*spita*.' Finally the doctor hit upon '*esputa*.'

"*Esputa?*" he inquired eagerly, "*Esputa you?*"

How should the distraught creature know what he was driving at? What he said was perfectly good Spanish and it meant 'Are you a whore?'

"*No señor*," she replied in great indignation. "*Soy virgin!*"

What does the white man do when he gets dysentery?

Most tropical doctors will answer that right away by saying : " My God ! man—don't get it in the first place." The same goes for malaria and of course for the social ailments. The thing to do is avoid drinking the wrong kind of water, avoid being bit by the wrong kind of mosquito, avoid eating too much of the wrong thing, avoid getting too hot or too cold or too damp or too dry. In other words, stay home with the bicarb on hand and your feet in a pan of steaming water.

What nonsense ! The American tropics is liberally sprinkled with excellent hospitals and reputable doctors. There's plenty of quinine, plasmochin, emetine, iodine, argyrol, and other specifics. I say go ahead and rub elbows with all the disease they can dish up to you. At that it will be less than what you encounter on one trip in New York's Lexington Avenue subway from Harlem to the Battery at any morning during the rush hours !

## Quick, Henry, the Flit

**N**O tropical treatise would be complete or even important without loving attention being given to the subject of bugs.

Have you ever seen an emerald-coloured cockroach coyly wiggling his antennæ at you from behind your soup plate? Have you ever seen a stalwart army of tiny red ants moving in a straight line from the south-east to the north-west corner of your dining-room, thereby entailing a direct march up one table leg,<sup>1</sup> across the table cloth (via the sugar bowl and vinegar cruet), thence down the opposite leg and on to their destination? Have you ever brushed unexpectedly into a painted wooden column on your porch only to have it crumble away, being nothing but a shell of paint completely eaten out inside by termites?

Well, I have.

This topic of vermin is so rich in subject-matter that it is hard to know where to start. By vermin I mean to include that generic body of living animalcules that wiggle, crawl, jump, fly—and lay eggs! Lay eggs, did I say? Why, the fauna of the tropics is so prolific that the very air is a spawning ground. Take the modest locust for example. All the female needs do is contemplate a gentleman locust's cellophane pyjamas—long since discarded and hanging unobtrusively from a twig—and right away she has a batch of little ones. I mean a *batch*! The locust doesn't do anything half-way—that is, if breeding and eating are any criteria. One day the

<sup>1</sup> It is customary, throughout the Far East and the American Tropics, to set the dining table and sideboard in tins of kerosene or some other liquid calculated to kill any vermin trying to gain the sugar bowl. Haw! I've seen the hardy little devils actually swimming about in the stuff as an appetizer before going to work on the ketchup.

railway track that winds its way from tropical sea-coast to the great agricultural interior is clear. The plantations of sugar, bananas, pineapple, and sisal (hennequin) stretch away in the somnolent sun in a never-ending sea of burnished green. There is not a sign of life save for the occasional buzzard suspended in air waiting for a certain mountain cow to decay sufficiently to make it worth while to descend. The drone of insects and the systole and diastole of heat waves—that is all.

The next morning the railway right of way is alive with tiny locusts hopping, hopping, hopping along. Lawns, pastures, truck gardens, and the vast acreage of plantations are blanketed with these curious little green creatures with their innocent dead-pan faces and engaging antennæ. If you happen to be playing golf or tennis, you might as well stop, because as fast as you sweep them away fresh waves crowd in about your ankles even as one wave follows another in never-ending sequence to the shore. By evening they are sifting their way through the screen door, through the windows, up the drain pipes, down the chimney. They are in the coffee-pot, in the shower, on the desk, in the bureau. . . . The next day the lawn is bare, the garden is gone, the hoppers have become flyers and they are in the tender green roots and leaves of your plantation, massed as thick as swarming bees. In a few days they will be gone, leaving behind them a trackless waste as completely bereft of green and living flora as though an unbroken sheet of fire had swept by!

Flying ants are nice too. I remember sitting on the porch of my Overseer's house one evening reading *Adventure* magazine when just as though some bell had been rung there appeared simultaneously from door-jambs, wainscoting, and every crack and crevice in the house an incredible teeming mass of ants. Not the regular little polished red ants with the slightly sour taste (they infest the sugar bowl, you know, and are most difficult to discern in the morning coffee), but little grubby white ones like maggots, with wings, if you please!

Quick, Henry, the Flit !

Or take scorpions : fortunately these are not as prolific as some of the other pests, but what they lack in numbers they make up for in wallop. Out of my entire experience with tropical vermin I think the scorpion is the most malignant and horrible of them all. He has a vicious expression, a loathsome body, and cold shell-like hide, the touch of which sends creeps through human flesh. I woke up one night with one walking across my face, so I ought to know. I also arose one morning and pulled on my right boot without taking the precaution of shaking it out first, with the result that my heel came down on a big buck scorpion full of fight. Instinctively I started to yank the boot off, but I could feel him trying to get his tail up to sting me and I knew that if I relieved the pressure the slightest he would be able to accomplish his purpose. Therefore I did a tap-dance.

You can have my share of tarantulas too. Take a silver dollar, pad it with well masticated chewing gum, append a batch of broken match sticks, dip the whole mess in liquid tar and roll it in monkey fur, slap on a couple of fish eggs for eyes—and you have some idea of what a tarantula looks like. Jump ? Why, it's positively fascinating to watch one of these spiders dip his hairy body up and down on those long limber legs in a preliminary work-out and then spring with lightning quick precision from the floor to the top of your dresser. The tarantula will give you an argument, too, any time you want it. Just thumb your nose at one when he's within striking range—and then duck.

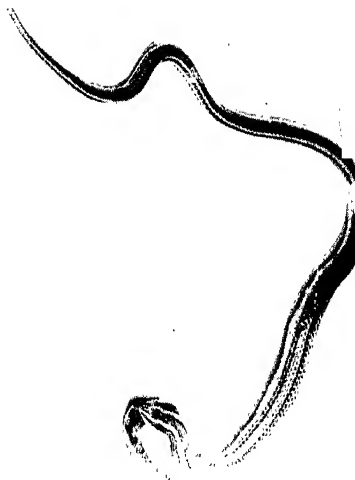
Mosquitoes, of course. One expects them. One is more or less prepared to cope with them. There's citronella for one thing—and there's mosquito netting for another. During the rainy season white men who work out of doors are obliged to wear gauntlets and to drape mosquito netting from the brim of their Stetsons to a point under the chin. Nevertheless I have seen occasions when men have been caught without these precautions and have been so persistently persecuted by hordes of mosquitoes that they finally gave up even trying to slay them off. I have seen men so worn down



(From left to right) Constantine, Pedro, Juan, Martin, and the baby—any one of them would like nothing better than to harpoon you. Drop down to Darien some day, why don't you?



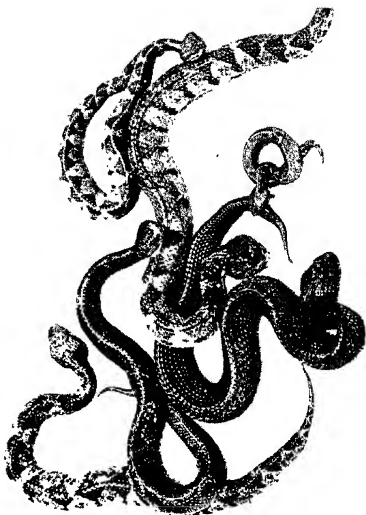
This delicate green whipsnake looks almost like a continuation of the branch to which it is attached.



Here's a snake methodically and patiently ingesting another.



Any one of these bush-masters is capable of striking a sudden and incredibly violent death.



By manipulating the glands venom is extracted to be crystallized into life-saving antivenine. Any time you encounter a snake with an arrowhead you may be pretty certain that it is deadly poisonous. Death in the morning—in the afternoon—or at night.

Snakes . . .







How would you like to have a gangrened appendix treated under this voodoo tent of the Darien Indians of Panama? You probably wouldn't live to tell the tale. This patient didn't !

by the attacks of these insects that they will sit on their cots by the lamplight with tears of exhaustion and futility rolling down their cheeks, still fascinated by the spectacle of these tiny monsters lighting on their bare flesh and right there beneath their eyes, drawing out the blood until their little bodies became a glowing, bloated red—miniature crimson blimps—so heavy that they could scarcely fly away. I have seen so many mosquitoes on the quivering haunch of a riding mule that they looked like a thick spread of caviar on burned toast—so many of them that it would be impossible to turn in the saddle and put your hand down without crushing a solid blanket of buzzing black things and jerking your hand away adrip with freshly drawn blood !

The American tropics lays claim to a fair share of the most venomous of snakes. The Bushmaster can destroy a labourer's optic nerve in a very few minutes and can blow his body up into an unrecognizable, writhing mass of tortured purple flesh in an astonishingly short space of time. There are some others that cause trouble, and a couple of varieties of poisonous toads that exude venom through the skin. But these are all self-defence mechanisms and there is no more reason for a traveller to encounter a snake in Central America than there is for him to encounter one in Punxsutawney ! It is only the peon who stand to suffer—the mozo and the white men who work in jungles or plantations and refuse to wear riding boots or high shoes and leather puttees. Even at that, all labourers work from clearing toward bush, so that as they advance on a job of jungle clearing, they have a better-than-even chance of seeing the snake first—and their machetes are more deadly by far than the fangs and poison sacs of an uncoiled snake.

We had a snake man down in Honduras who loved to collect and mess around with snakes. His hide was scarred from innumerable bites, and it was common thought that his blood stream had set up a resistance to venom after all the years it had been shot into his system. But he was pretty cagey when it came to dealing with the *barba amarillas*. They dealt out death altogether too rapidly. I recall the day he packed one of these monsters in a bag to take north to

demonstrate for a news reel short. He was all dressed up in crisp white linen and had left his quarters after leaving specific advice with a friend as to how to minister to his pet boa during his absence. That boa was quite tame; at least, he was always willing to accommodate his master by winding his twelve feet of super-muscular tubing about a visitor's arm and squeezing while the master kept the patient from serious difficulty by unwinding one coil as fast as the snake wound up another.

The snake man and his little box were safely aboard and ready to sail when a hurry-up call came from shore to the effect that Carl (that was the boa's name) had escaped and was evidently coming down to the wharf to see his master off. A concentrated man-hunt finally revealed Carl snuggling his great mass into the burned-out stump-hole of a fallen tree. The master spoke to him sharply, but all he got in reply was a vicious whip of snake tail about his ankles. That was too much. He called for a burlap bag and he hopped down into the hole in his crisp whites, only to become hopelessly snarled up in Carl's coils. Carl didn't want to play, he wanted to squeeze. And before we realized it he had two or three lengths about his master's middle and was causing veins to stand out like advanced varicocoele on the man's neck and temples. Then he got a grip about the ribs and the wind came whistling out through the poor fellow's teeth. All the while, he was fighting, fighting—uncoiling Carl in one place as Carl took a fresh hold somewhere else. All the while he was shaking his head toward his room-mate who held a drawn revolver and was ready to step up and give one to Carl behind the left ear. But finally, with the sweat dripping from him, his clothes torn to ribbons, and his eyeballs popping out of their sockets, the man weakened, collapsed, and Carl was shot!

Fun? Nothing like it for a hobby. The snake man caught his boat though and we didn't see him again for three months. When he did return, he was a shaking, pallid shadow of the husky who had battled so manfully with Carl.

"What the hell has happened to you? Something bite you?"

Yeah. That was it. Something *had* bitten him. That Bushmaster he had taken north so lovingly in the little box.

"I had a tough time getting the movie moguls to listen to me," he explained through pale lips. "Finally I cornered one and I showed him how to dramatize the deadliness of the species of snake I had there, and then I put the brute under a big hat and told him the stunt was to reach the hand in under the brim and get the snake out without being bitten. You know—out-thinking the snake."

It seems that the mogul who came to scoff remained to praise. The trick was performed right under his very eyes. Excitedly then he rushed in and corralled the others, and the snake man reluctantly did it again.

"They thought it was just a trick and that I could do it any time. I couldn't tell them that every time I did it the snake got wiser. No. They must shoot the scene right then and there. So they ran me into a studio and rolled out the cameras and I went through my act. Then they wanted a re-take. I refused. No re-take, no money. What could I do? I slid my hand in and believe me it felt just like two hypodermic needles being crammed straight through my thumb when that little devil struck. And by the time I got fixed up I wound up with double pneumonia!"

Fun, hunh?

I've seen tiny green whip snakes which look just like stems of a fern. And I've ridden under giant *matapalo* trees in the heart of the jungle and looked up to behold a huge emerald serpent coiled over the limb with a hungry, beady eye on my jugular. But I minded my business and attempted neither hypnosis nor sharp-shooting.

Tropical lizards, as seen by the amateur eye, are either the clean little bright-eyed chameleons which scuttle about the walls and gobble up flies, or the big rangy iguanas up to six feet in length. These brutes used to hang around on the tennis-court, baking in the sun, and we discovered a way to catch them quite by accident. (What for? The vegetarian ones are good in the stew-pot.) They are infernally fast, moving their low-slung bodies along on squat legs, tipped

with talon claws, much after the manner of a football player weaving and ploughing through the line. One of our members smacked a tennis-ball at a slumbering iguana, catching him amidships, and so startling him that he started to peg-leg it without looking where he was going. He ran smack into the wire mesh behind the service court, and his bullet head with hackles standing on end became so entangled that he couldn't move forward or back.

Up the beach we used to hide in the mangroves along the lagoon and watch these fellows. Their heads and the pouches beneath the jaws were of powder-blue; bodies were pale orange turning dust-grey, and they had wattles running down the spinal column like the giant *Sauria* of old. Mostly they devoted themselves to breeding or fighting for the right to do so. And the pitched battles between two evenly matched males were sometimes of astonishing length and ferocity. They would hiss, claw, and bite, fighting like bulldogs, until one weakened; whereupon the victor would stand over the prostrate body and tear it into bloody strips before slithering away into the underbrush to be followed by the female. Thousands of red and silver fritillary butterflies hung over the scum, evidently as interested in those iguana love affairs as we.

Other particularly objectionable forms of tropical life in this classification are: giant purple sand crabs (the kind which nipped little Kim's toe); vampire bats which sweep down into the corrals in the dead of a misty night and so subtly withdraw the blood from the livestock that the poor animals never even awaken until morning; the gusano—a white worm which attacks man and beast alike, burrowing a hole into the flesh (their pet spot on a man is under his toes) and laying eggs therein to be hatched and to raise merry hell what with the itching and festering until they can be ejected; and finally, the tiny red wood tick, or garrapata, which can miraculously transfer itself in quantity from a leaf or a frond, down the back of your neck, there to resist with the tenacity of the Yale line on the one-yard line any and all attempts to be removed from your person!

Quick, Henry! . . .

## *'Lousy' is the Word for Monkeys*

THERE are times when the word 'lousy' is in order. Describing Central America's pet monkeys is a point in question. Wait till the first day you're in a *cantina* or a private home whose proprietor owns a pet night monkey. Wait till he turns his pet loose in the daylight. The absence of darkness hits across the fuzzy little face like a whip, and likely as not he'll dart for you and grope his way into your shirt, eventually to nuzzle down against your skin at the crook of the elbow like a little frightened rabbit. So nice and furry and friendly and pathetic he feels . . . so scabrous and itchy and, let's be brutally frank, downright lousy he really is that you'll be shortly thereafter!

Or consider the pet Capuchin—he of the light foot, quick, responsive brain and white-cowled skull. Yes, he's none other than the Italian organ-grinder's right bower. You'll find him in boarding houses, hotels, residences, and perched disconsolately upon the top of the prostitutes' Chinese screen. Scrofulous little bastard, he is, yet withal so eager to be palsy-walsys that the slightest inkle of friendliness on your part, and mister, he's all over you like spilled gravy! He's so utterly uninhibited that one is prone to be carried away by his verve and spirit of camaraderie, overlooking the fact that the hard little fuzzy body is swarming with lice.

Once a spider monkey conceives a passion for you, there is no side-stepping his demonstrations of affection. The monk revels in intimacies; yours and his alike. As a rule, he will spring on to your shoulder, wrap a prehensile tail around your neck, thereby releasing tiny little padded hands and feet, the better to search through your scalp for tender little morsels. Failing to do business, he next unwraps his tail and plops into your lap, exposing the most intimate portions of

his anatomy for *your* inspection and delectation. Hell ! Just because he couldn't poll a vote on you doesn't mean that you can't on him. And once reject his advances, shoving him away and he'll bounce back to his eyrie, screaming invectives, furiously scratching and letting you and all others within range know precisely how you stand with him. Or take a pass at his mistress and get an earful of his comments !

Marmosets are for sale along the streets of Panama. Their hard, hairless faces of dark blue, drawn tightly across tiny skulls framed in light-coloured hair, remind a person of the shrunken heads of Ecuador's Jivaro Indians. Yet they're gentle little animals, uttering cheerful twittering trills and long-drawn chirps singularly birdlike, as they poke their faces into flowers offered by passers-by or sit on the top of their masters' display boards plaintively nibbling the sheets of lottery tickets.

As the living things in the tropics increase in size they tend to decrease in objectionability. Many of the animals and birds make lovable pets. We always had a pair of macaws, love birds or parakeets about the house. Responsibility for their welfare and deportment usually fell on the cook, but she loved them, and they her. They'd perch unconcernedly on her shoulder and affectionately whet their beaks against her sharp cheekbone. They were in the flour, they were in the beans, they were tormenting the chickens. They were for ever making an unholy mess all over the place. Once, though, I was quartered with a white man who was as jealous of a scrawny macaw as a dog fancier of a thoroughbred dog. That damn bird would roost on the back of the dining-room chairs, gnawing plaintively at the occupant's ear lobe, occasionally reaching down and tearing off a beakful of splinters from the chair (just to show off) and, most reprehensible of all, turning loose the most piercing squawks, so close that one could feel the hot breath on the back of the neck. He'd snatch at food, too, *en route* from plate to mouth, raising holy hell if the manoeuvre failed. Yet the owner would be furious if anybody failed to see the charm of the brute.

used to grope around, surreptitiously, for the long sweep of blue, red, and yellow tail feathers, when that macaw kicked my chair, and just as the bird would give evidence of unusual interest in the contents of my plate, I'd yank—then tuck !

The pisote, or ant-eater, is a droll and endearing pet—yet a devil even in his sleep. He has a sharp, pointed face like a weasel, neatly turned ears, bright, shoe-button eyes, and a very long, very cold, and very inquisitive nose—and an elegant brush. Bunthorne was the name of the first one I owned. His function was to keep the house cleared of vermin, and I will say that while he was with us, ants in the pantry were few and far between. The catch was that Bunny could raise more professional hell in a pantry in ten minutes than an army of ants in ten years of honest labour ! Bunthorne also considered it his duty to help me in the preparation of the monthly farm pay-roll. These pay-roll sheets were impressive in size and complicated in content. It took hours to ink one in. But it never took Bunthorne more than one second to catapult his fuzzy, roly-poly body over the sheets as though he were one of those circular, rocking blotters that once adorned grandmother's *escritoire*. God ! what a mess he could make. And with what patience he would hang round awaiting his chance. But once his craving had been satisfied, he would lie on his back and expose his tummy, with the most beatific look about him. You just couldn't save the heart to bat his ears down.

Bunthorne, in keeping with all pisotes, had one trick—an instinctive one. The little dope didn't have the brains to knock a cricket off a crocker, but if you tossed a lighted cigarette at his feet he would attack it furiously from the lamp ends. His busy little paws would shred it in lightning-quick flecks until there was nothing left but the glowing coal. This he would then dance around, striking at it as deftly and delicately as a cat playing with a mouse. Nature never abhorred a vacuum any more than Bunthorne abhorred fire.

Akin to the pisote is the mongoose. Every time I write



or talk about this rodent I find myself so confused as to the proper plural that I am instantly reminded of the story of one of the Governors of Jamaica. The island was overrun with snakes at the time, and the Governor called his secretary in to dispatch a requisition to the home office for twelve of these little Riky-tiky-tavi.

"What's the plural, me Lord?"

"The plural? Why, it's . . . Harrumph. Have you no wits, my man? Must I make out the requisition myself?"

"No, your Lordship. I'll make it out, but how?"

"Simple, you simpleton. Just do as I tell you. Order one mongoose and eleven others. Now be gone!"

By far the most popular house pets in the tropics are birds—not little yellow bits of fluff in gilded cages, but big raucous honest-to-God birds—macaws with brilliant plumage three and four feet long, peacocks with their gorgeous fans, husky yellow, blue, and red parrots with sharp Semitic beaks and fat black tongues that look like glorified erasers. Visit the aviary in the fragrant and secluded garden of the Myrtle Bank Hotel at Kingston, Jamaica, next time you are there. Here are some of the rarest and finest specimens to be found in the tropics. Of particular interest are the troupiales, or Colombian bugle birds. They are about the size of starlings, black wings trimmed in white, golden breasts, bright yellow eyes rimmed with blue. They're cocky and they bounce. They fluff up and they're friendly; most of all they pipe an incredible and fascinating bugle call as clear as a hunter's horn on a frosty morn. Then there are the Sangres de Oro—aristocratic birds with black wings and tails, wine-coloured heads and blood-red breasts. Nightingales, too, of uniform pearl-grey with eloquent dark eyes and throats from which pour profuse strains of unpremeditated art—effortless, liquid songs so beautiful and sad that they catch at your heart-strings. Something of an imitator is this bird, too—although why such a master of song should deign to interpret the melodic progressions of his inferiors is a mystery. Nevertheless, frequently after a troupiale has sounded his clarion call, the nightingale will hop up and render such a perfect imitation,

that were you to close your eyes, you would swear it was the genuine article.

Hunting is good in Central America's mighty jungles. Speaking of a tropical rodent in six letters beginning with 'a,' the agouti is only one of an endless zoological collection. The trees are alive with barking baboons and the little howling monkeys with their babies on their backs, who skip along their vast aerial highway night after night, bound on their heckling quests that never seem to commence anywhere nor get anywhere. There's mountain cow, black jaguar, wild boar, tapir, whip-tailed iguana, paca, coati mundi, the sloth hanging for hours and hours by his tail, as motionless as a sack of oats. Here's the hunter's paradise as well as the answer to the cross-word puzzle addict's fondest dream.

Through the immense entanglement of branches and over the misty, miasmic inland waterways wing mournful egrets, flying symbols of spotless purity splashed against the green and yellow and lavender of the jungle. Chattering parakeets and macaws flash their gaudy reds, greens, yellows, and blues against the verdant backdrop in utter disregard of the hunter's gun. Wild turkeys are a little cagier, Nature somehow communicated to them the knowledge that they are choice eating, but they can be picked off by patient stalking, although this frequently means building a smudge and standing in the midst of it, choking and blinking, to keep the mosquitoes from settling in a solid black mass on the back of the neck or on any other exposed section of the anatomy. For real results, however (and I'm not saying for real sport) the best method is to hunt at night with a jack-light. Alligators are a set-up under such conditions; their beady red eyes come right up to the side of the dugout and you can almost lean over and whack them with a hammer, whereas at day-time it is rare that you can get close enough to one of them to get a decent shot. Practically any animal responds to that mysterious night light, and it's just a question of which particular pair of blazing eyes you care to shoot between.

Extended hunting trips involve no end of hard work and privation. You may have to carry your own hammocks,

water, food, and ammunition or else fall back on native beans, tortillas, and eggs—and that may mean dysentery.

Imagine pitching camp in the mighty jungle. String your grass hammock between the trees—and take care that the ropes do not intersect a covered ant run, or fifty million red ants will pursue the even tenor of their way up and down the tree via your entire anatomy. Picture yourself lying in your hammock, snug beneath your blanket, face up to the peculiarly lavender-blue canopy of a tropical nocturnal heaven, the illimitable stars winking down at you through a tracery of branches, lianas, creepers so luxuriant that the monkeys swing along their aerial paths as though they were on the ground.

At dawn you awaken to the aroma of coffee and trout, to behold the mist rising majestically through the dripping greenery, up, up into the infinite blue of the sky. A pair of fruit crows wing past, flying low, swiftly drumming their way through the manaca palms and below the orchid-bedecked limbs of the giant Ceiba trees. There are six chattering macaws, with tails as long as the pheasant's and colourful as the flags on a cruise liner. An ant-eater has been contentedly chewing your boot all night, extracting considerable nourishment with his needle-sharp white teeth. Perhaps a pair of razor-back hogs have scratched themselves persistently on your back when you were in your hammock.

Ai ! For colour and sound and life that teems and swarms and crowds in upon your every sensibility, there's nothing like the tropics—be it Señora Delgadilla's kitchen or the great, green jungle that for ever threatens to enfold the poor labours of man-made civilization in a mossy, orchidaceous embrace, calling her living creatures back to her bosom once more.

## *Behold the Fisherman*

THE Ancient Mariner at his most inspired never envisioned denizens of the deep to compare with the dazzling assortment which infest Nature's natural aquarium—the Spanish Main ! Consider for a moment the infinite stretches of lonely beach extending from Yucatan to Colombia—the coral barriers, the bights, bays, and lagoons, some land-locked and others flush with the sea save for shallow, sunken sand bars. Nosing along in the trough of a glassy sea, you will encounter vast schools of fish ; amberjack, roosterfish, bonito, Spanish mackerel, the translucent and lethargic needlefish, silver jets of minnow that fall away in iridescent fountains to the right and left as the prow of your boat cuts through their midst.

Off-shore, toward the archipelago of tiny islands which stud the glowing waters, lurk the predatory barracuda, the sun ray, shark, and tarpon. There is no delight to compare with fishing off those cays which extend from Guatemala all along the coast-line of Central America. Each one is perfect—a lone palm or two, a stretch of dazzling silver-powdered sand unbesmirched save by an occasional snarl of seaweed or a fallen coco-nut husk, long since reamed of its meat by a hermit crab, now the occupant of the shell. Then the water gradually deepening—running a colour gamut from palest aquamarine through a mosaic of greens that finally melt from emerald into azure. Here are gradations of green and blue so delicate that only the peacock's feathers come anywhere near interpreting them. And down on the sea floor, in the shallows, are fantastic underwater jungles of coral ; sea fans as delicate as hand-carved Chinese ivory, grotesque sponges tinted violet and purple, masses of brainhead coral pierced by fluted columns that remind you of the pipes of an organ.

Through this vast congeries of sea architecture, move rainbow fish, jazz fish, and sea centipedes, nosing through the fantastic waving feelers of sea anemones that look for all the world like giant yellow chrysanthemums.

Watch for saucy crabs, conches, clusters of sea eggs, blow fish, and the thousand-and-one forms of life that inhabit these wild cays. See those lavender jelly fish whose diaphanous envelopes vibrate so gracefully, so effortlessly as they propel themselves through the water? They remind you of the silken drapes of a dancing girl, but there is acid-hot agony in their slightest touch. Some of the fish, like those giant barracuda flashing cleanly through the strong shafts of sunlight cutting down, down into the sea, fight in a way you understand. But many of the innocuous looking forms of underwater life, the octopi, the sea snails, and the plant life, strike with poison darts, revolting secretions, and stinging, silken feelers that sear the flesh like live wires.

Down in Costa Rican waters and along the two coasts of Panama you can just about write your own ticket. Perhaps your dish is the skipjack—five to ten pounds of scrappy fish if you're adept with rod and light tackle. Troll for him between May and November. Or, if you happen to have about three hundred feet of strong rope on your person, not to mention a few harpoons, the patience of Job, the courage of Hercules, and the craft of Izaak Walton, you may confidently expect to bag a half ton of ray—fully equipped with sting, electric shocker, and the exclusive ovoviviparous feature. What you will do with the prize is something else; kipper it, perhaps, or serve as *hors d'œuvre* to the Chinese army!

Among the species inhabiting the Bay of Panama are the black marlin (a 250-pounder, 10 feet 1 inch in length, was recently landed in six hours and forty minutes, caught on a feather bait), a variety of sharks, including the tiger and hammerhead, broadbill swordfish, yellow jack, and tuna.

The sailfish in Panama are exceptionally large and are raised by trolling a teaser and by trolling with feather bait. They fight furiously and make long surface runs and air

flights. They will exceed nine feet in length and tip the scales at 100 pounds or more.

From Honduras south to the Panama Canal it is a sportsman's paradise. Fishing boats are readily available at almost any port. Down in Panama where they take their angling seriously, tackle and guides may be hired for small parties on trips of one, two, three days—or longer. Some of these guides are rare specimens of *Pithecanthropus erectus*, men who have been around and who can tell yarns that leave your imagination fluttering like a trout in the scuppers.

The Panamanian rivers and lakes are grand fishing too. So, for that matter, are the inland waters of all the republics of Central America. But in Panama the facilities are further developed. There's the enormous Gatun Lake, for example—the largest artificial lake in the world, 164 square miles in area, a shore-line of 1100 miles, maintaining a false level of 85 feet above the sea in order to serve the giant lock system of the Canal. This lake, the Chagres River, and the upper waters of the Chiriqui Viejo River are all teeming with game fish. Less than a year ago, the Chiriqui Viejo was stocked with rainbow trout. Here is fishing at an elevation of four thousand feet! Bring your blankets, frying-pans, and guns. Deer, wild pig, wild turkey, and mountain hen abound in these uplands.

In Jamaica, blue marlin weighing up to one hundred and fifty fighting pounds are there for the anglers who know the answers. Mullet should be used for bait, and a high outrigger and Izaak Walton had better be ready to pay out up to a hundred fathoms of line after the marlin has tapped the bait with his sword. Some fishermen have reported that the fighting marlin after rising to the surface have shot for the boat, jamming the fisherman's line against the guard so that for a while, at least, he becomes obliged to play the fish with the line in his bare hands—and only the fisherman knows how that can burn! A steel centre rod and a 36-thread cuttyhunk line with a breaking strain of ninety pounds is indicated for a job of this nature. Other denizens in Jamaican waters include barracuda, tuna, wahoo, amberjack, bonito, covina,

grouper, and snapper, while in the fresh water region with which Jamaica abounds (after all, Jamaica means 'the land of many springs') the fisherman will find mountain mullet and snook.

The entire Caribbean is no place for any but the seasoned and experienced adventurer. Proficiency with rod and gun is essential, yes. But more than that, there must be in the veins of the sportsman that irresistible quality that makes a man at one with Nature and that stirs his heart and sinew to supreme heights to master the old lady on her own home grounds.

One of the greatest tropical sportsmen and fishermen I ever knew was Doc Bolton. He was practising in Honduras and he had his patients, particularly the obstetrical cases, so perfectly trained that there never seemed to be any difficulty in slipping away for an afternoon of trolling whenever the conditions of sea and sky and wind were propitious.

Doc was one of those utterly charming individuals, soft-spoken, soft-skinned, soft-hearted. He had a bedside manner that would melt the heart of the dourest hypochondriac and a touch which would assuage the most anguished flesh. Everybody loved Doc. Somehow you never would get the idea that he was a fighter . . . that is, until you boarded his thirty-foot cruiser. Even then, the framed admonition in his cabin was disarming :

Behold the Fisherman.  
He riseth up in the morning  
He disturbeth the whole household  
Mighty are his preparations  
He goeth forth full of hope  
When the day is far spent he returneth  
Smelling of strong drink  
And the truth is not in him

The very first time I was aboard, headed out over that blaze of open water towards the bay islands, Doc connected with a big one. Down went his rod tip, bobbing like a sapling in a high wind. The line hummed like a taut guitar string. The reel sang its sweetly strident song and the power was snapped off.

Doc's normally gentle mouth was drawn as tight as his line, now all a-glisten with water as it rose clear from the surface of the sea. Doc's normally unruffled brow became furrowed and beaded with sweat. Doc's usual gentle voice became harsh and his carefully selected vocabulary studded with terms that only the practised mule-skinner—or deep-water fisherman would employ. I stared at this metamorphosis, amazed at the change this fighting, boring, bobbing tarpon could make. Why, Doc was a scrapper. His chin was out and the muscles stood like whipcords on his arms as he battled that fish, thumbing the brake, yielding when he had to, advancing when he could. No matter how mad, how frantic the tarpon's run, Doc matched his spirit. It became a hand-to-hand encounter—with everything but a bit of tackle and a hook in favour of the fish. I never saw a fisherman make such a personal issue of the thing as Doc did.

The battle went on out there in the brassy heat for hours. At the end the man was worn out, exhausted—his hands blistered, his face burned, his arms and shoulders nearly atrophied. He lost the fish finally. But as soon as the battle was over, Doc returned to normal again. He wasn't bitter in defeat. It was the fight that he wanted—and got!

"Gives me a chance to blow off steam," he explained. "I can only stand so much of the operating-room. I can only subdue my instincts so long. Then I put up my bone hammer and come out here to go berserk."

Once more we were cruising toward the cays. Violet and saffron tinged the evening sky. We were at peace with the world.

"I'm *persona non grata* with the navy here, you know," he confided. "I went out on a two-lunged coastguard boat with the Vice-President once and got in a beautiful jam. We were both trolling for tarpon, and each of us got one on at the same time. They both leapt clear—big babies they were, too. Over a hundred pounds. In no time they crossed one another and our lines snagged."

"It looked to me as though the V-P's fish had come across my line. But his nibs didn't see it that way. 'Cut it, my good



fren', he tells me. And you know I wouldn't deliberately cut any line. I told him so. He had his line wrapped around a stanchion and started to make it fast. He was going to cut my line for me. So I used some fairly strong language. Threatened to kick a lung out of him, as I recall.

" 'What is it that you say?' he screams. 'Is it possible that you refuse to cut the line? Are you not on the *guardacosta* of the navy, where I rank as Admiral? I, Constantine Padilla Tiburcio José de la Cruz Mendoza, who am about to catch ze shark?'

"It went on like that for some time, but we both hung on and finally his fish shook loose. He wouldn't speak to me for months. If it wasn't for the modest part I played in helping his wife have twins, I'd have probably been run out of the country."



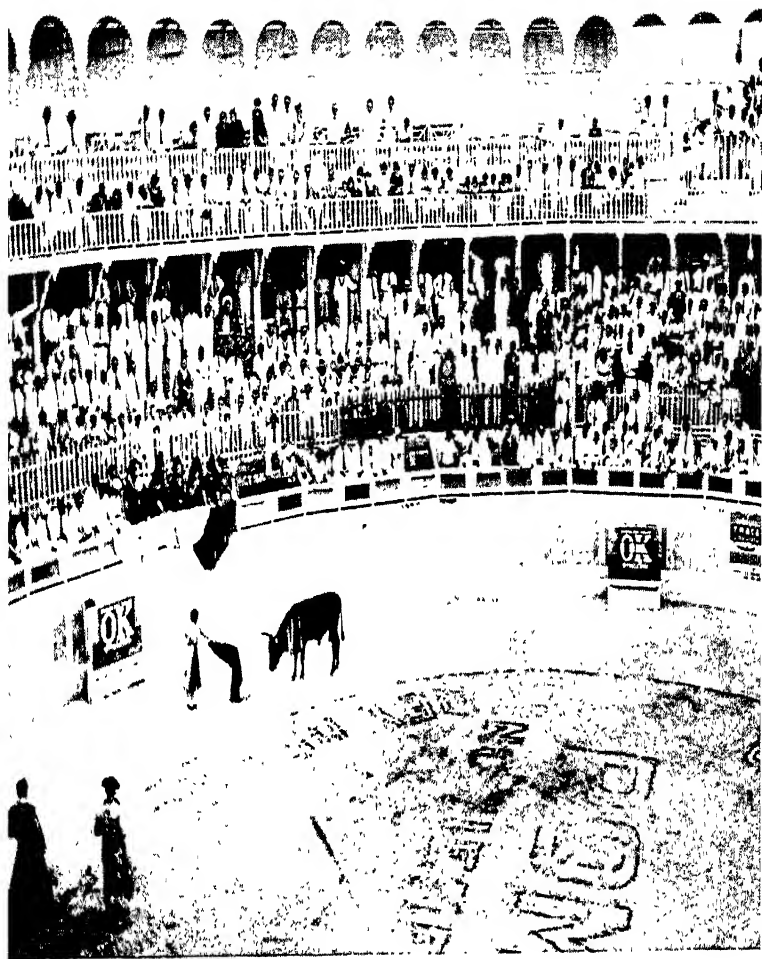
*iblishers Photo, N.Y.*

“Charlie!” that’s what they shout. “Fling us a buffalo”  
(a nickel to you). And they’ll dive—don’t worry about that  
—down twenty feet or more!

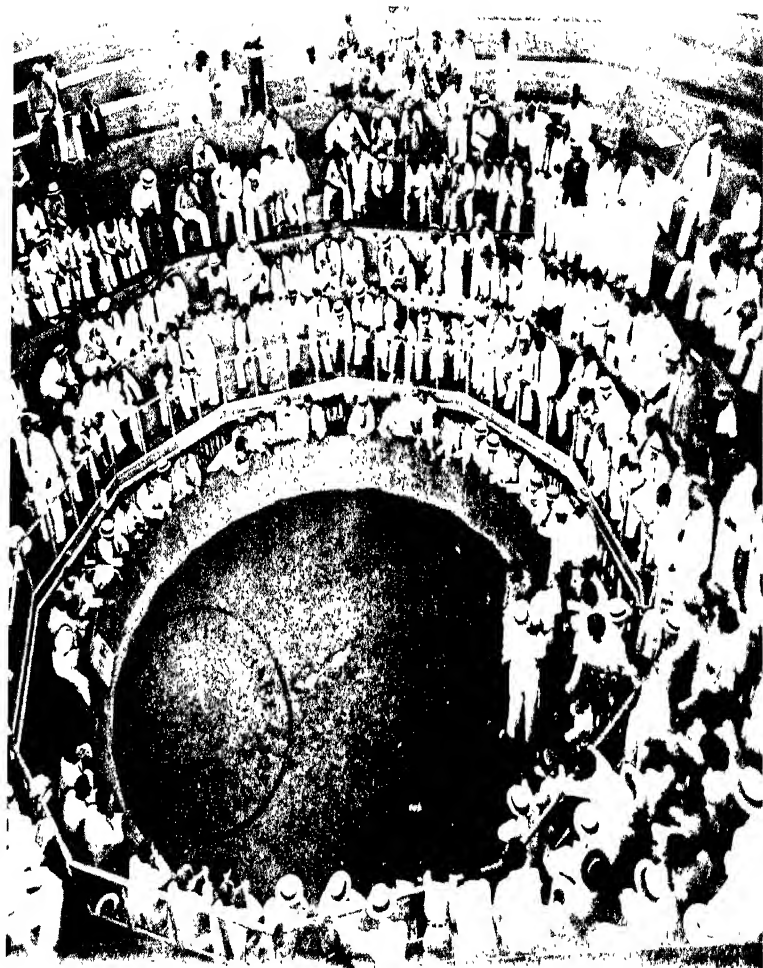


*American Photo Studios, Havana, Cuba*

When the King of Spain learned that the fortifications of Cartagena cost so many million *pesos*, he rushed to the terrace of his palace at Madrid and scanned the horizon. "If it cost that much money, I should be able to see it from here."



Bull-fighting in the American tropics is on its last legs. So is the bull as a general rule.



Indians bring their fighting cocks, carefully wrapped, over many miles of bitterly cold trail—simply to see them hacked to bits. And on top of that they lose a year's savings !

## Blue Plate Tropicale

WITH the exception of San Antonio, Texas, I have yet to discover any city north of the Rio Grande where one can really get tropical food. I mean coffee-essence—that syrupy solution of the coffee bean, properly served in a vinegar cruet and to which must be added vast quantities of hot milk. I mean red beans whipped down into a creamy pulp, garnished with onions and green peppers, and fried for breakfast. I mean those paper-thin steaks vaguely reminiscent of kerosene, that the Latins love to serve broiled to a cinder. I mean alligator pears removed from the tree under your own sight, halved and served at once with nothing but a slug of ketchup. I mean chicken *tamales* wrapped in fresh dewy banana leaves and eaten from them with the fingers. And I mean *tortillas*—hoe cakes—hand-fashioned—that taste like hominy.

I like Spanish food in a Spanish atmosphere. That means red ants in the distance, bright-eyed cockroaches in the offing, the pungent odour of goats and mules and the association of incredibly scrawny cats, dogs, and chickens underfoot. This collective natural bouquet added to the aroma of parching coffee beans and the sizzling stench of pork grease from open-air ovens is what gives a tropical meal its flavourful tang.

Personally, I go for the humbler foods of the natives: I like *tule*, a thickish gruel of parched corn, cacao, and sugar which is usually served in a scooped-out coco-nut gourd. And fried platanos or plantain, as well as thick okra soup swimming with beans and peppers. And *pisto manchego*—scrambled eggs with tomato and red pepper. And, of course, that king of all tropical dishes, arroz con pollo—chicken and yellow rice. Yum-mie!

Like oysters, some of these tropical dishes are repulsive at first sight or smell. They must be cultivated. But once they have become palatable they will never be forgotten. The saddest spectacle of epicureanism that I have beheld in this great country of ours is that of the forsaken, hungry souls from the tropics with money in their pockets and gastric juice in their stomachs, wandering from one so-called Spanish restaurant to another, vainly seeking, ever seeking, for the food and the atmosphere that they once knew in the tropics.

In the highlands of Guatemala the best eating is right in the Indian compounds—beans, eggs, greens, and fruit—and there's that inimitable custom of steaming everything with savoury herbs picked off the roadside hedges. But the Indians try to avoid serving these spiced dishes to white people (they think all we eat is roast beef) so you'll have to fight for them !

Jamaica probably offers a greater variety of food than any of the other Caribbean countries. The famous Admiral Bligh who was so ignominiously chucked off the *Bounty* by Clark Gable introduced the breadfruit into Jamaica. The neophyte sinking eager molars into his first slice of this vegetable usually discovers that it tastes like a pasteboard beer coaster fried in rancid oil. Breadfruit is another of these delicacies that must be cultivated. The same goes for ackees, pawpaws, and soursap. Then there is no end of sea foods—crabs, shrimp, squids, as well as many other forms of the most repulsive-looking sea life that offer the delighted tongue new taste thrills, and furnish the enervated system with vitamins which have yet to be recorded in our twenty-six letter alphabet. Jamaica produces bananas that are green, orange, pink, cream-coloured, yellow speckled, and streaked. There are apple bananas and lady finger bananas. Some taste like peaches, others like pears, and some even have the flavour of the rose. Yes !

The Myrtle Bank Hotel on the rim of Kingston harbour thinks nothing of including on its menus such items as coco-nut water, coco-nut plums, coco-nut fritters, red grapefruit,

amberjack, turtle stew, poached blue parrot fish, codfish, and ackees, yellow tail snapper, blue mountain pigeon, snook, and shrimp. Along with these delicacies are offered vegetables whose names and taste are as indescribable as they are exotic.

Don't get the impression that all is easy eating in the tropics. There are many poor little homes strung along through the jungle and in the interior highlands where a man is lucky if he can suck a fresh egg and wash it down with a swig of white eye. There are places where a handful of parched corn represents breakfast—and sailors who grumble about hardtack have not really given their gums a thrill until they have tried to macerate a mouthful of these parched kernels, with nothing but water to soften up the agony.

It has always been one of Nature's profoundest mysteries to me how humans can suffer on the verge of starvation for months at a time as many of the Central American and West Indian peons do, albeit they live in country that is so incredibly rich in its vegetation. And it is equally mysterious how those brown mothers with such a pitiful lack of nourishment can yet haul off and have babies and then proceed to produce well-filled breasts, handing same out of their blouses on the slightest provocation and giving over to their children as though they, the mothers, had nothing whatsoever to do with the whole business—as indeed, they haven't!

Yet in the lowlands there seems to be no fruit, vegetable or tuber that cannot be grown with miraculous ease. The delicate and rare mangosteen grows as readily along the Carribean as apples in Oregon. Lemons as big as grapefruit, and grapefruit as big as footballs weigh down the branches of their respective mother trees. Limes and kumquats, mangoes and papayas, pineapple and infinitely sweet green oranges are happy to be given sanctuary in your yard and will richly repay you for your passing trouble in planting them.

As far as the entrée is concerned, there's wild turkey, pig, vegetarian iguana, venison, and ant eater. All are tasty and tender—and it is only the greenhorn who sticks to his oh-so-tough beef and oh-so-scrawny chicken.



The blue plate special has not yet descended upon the American tropics, but when it does, I foresee a great exodus of Elks, Rotarians, and Kiwanians, who will pitch their mystic symbols before the ramshackled hotels announcing to the world that their Lodge meets every Tuesday noon. That's because it's grand eating once you get the hang of it.

## *Drink—and the Devil*

**A**NYBODY who tries to tell you that alcohol is not one of the dominant characteristics of the tropics is either a member of the W.C.T.U. or doesn't know what he is talking about !

Rum ! From the moment your south-bound ship first pokes her nose into Havana's exquisite harbour your nostrils and tonsils are constantly tormented with the bouquet of sunny fermentations. So it has been through the ages. Back in the days of Henry Morgan rum was earning the reputation of being a spirit, mild, balsamic, and benign ! Rum and hot water with lemon and sugar at night was discovered by the good folk of Jamaica to be sovereign against cold. The archives of an historical library in Kingston recently brought to light the following gem of purest rays serene, too long hidden in the dark, unfathomed shelves of that admirable institution :

' You must take it in bed. Premature consumption merely wastes the good creature. It should be brewed in a large rummer glass, as hot as you can drink it—not too sweet, but so strong that you sink back at once on the pillow, resigning the glass to the ready hand of a sympathizing bedside attendant, preferably feminine ! '

Even to-day the old reliable recipe for Planter's Punch still holds : one sour, two sweet, three strong, and four weak. That means lime juice, sugar syrup, rum, and water, in the quantities indicated.

A seventeenth-century historian by the name of Esquemeling, himself a buccaneer, has brilliantly recorded the drinking conduct and drinking exploits of the ' brethren of the coast '—including such gentle souls as that arch-murderer of the high

seas, Sir Henry Morgan, and Roche Brasilliano, and Bartolomew Portugas—who were contemporaneous with him in the art of throat-slitting as well as throat-quenching. Recounting the indulgences of these pirates at old Port Royal, Jamaica, in a Dutch work<sup>1</sup> he paints the following street scene :

‘ Their gains they spend with great liberality, giving themselves freely to all manner of vices and debauchery, among which the first is that of drunkenness, which they exercise for the most part with brandy ; this they drink as liberally as the Spaniards do clear fountain-water. Sometimes they buy together a pipe of wine (an old measure of 110 gallons) ; this they stave at one end, and never cease drinking till they have made an end of it. Thus they celebrate the festivals of Bacchus so long as they have any money left.’

Again in writing of the pirates’ conduct ashore Esquemeling says :

‘ All these prizes they carried into Jamaica, where they safely arrived, and, according to their custom, wasted in a few days in taverns and stews all they had gotten, by giving themselves to all manner of debauchery. . . . Such of these pirates are found who spend 2 or 3 thousand pieces of eight in one night, not leaving themselves peradventure a good shirt to wear on their backs in the morning. My own master would buy, on like occasions, a whole pipe of wine, and, placing it in the street, would force every one that passed by to drink with him, threatening also to pistol them, in case they would not do it. At other times he would do the same with barrels of ale or beer. And, very often, with both his hands, he would throw these liquors about the streets, and wet the clothes of such as walked by, without regarding whether he spoiled their apparel or not, were they men or women.’

Now that, I aver, is distinctly alcoholic !

<sup>1</sup> ‘ *De Americanische Zeerovers*,’ Amsterdam, 1678.

In interesting contrast to the technique in the days of Henry Morgan is the method the Bacardi rum people employ nowadays in exposing the unsuspecting tourist to their various ambrosias.<sup>1</sup> I reported this to the New York Sunday *World* under the masthead.

YO HO HO !

*Rum Experiences in Cuba*  
*After the Grand Manner*

From shipside to the rummery of a blistering Cuban afternoon is no mean undertaking. Heat waves, humidity and assorted odours lie so heavily along the waterfront that they constitute a malignant atmospheric force to be faced at your peril. As you leave the boat and enter the stifling launch, invisible fingers seem to be groping for your Adam's apple. And since you hail from New England odds are 4 to 1 they'll find it.

On shore it is worse. The heat is terrific. Blood pounds against your temples. Glittering adobe houses dance crazily before your eyes.

But you have an invitation to inspect the local rum works at 3, so you brave the sun-baked beach and struggle up into that slumbering, sweltering city.

"So you've come to see the wheels go 'round . . . and how." The ghost of a smile lights the pallid face of your host and guide. "It is a great pleasure, indeed, to show you about the plant." He takes your arm. "First we go this way."

<sup>1</sup> If there be any amongst us who doubt that Cuba's Bacardi cocktail ranks anywhere but at the top, let such a Doubting Thomas proceed by ship or 'plane to Havana, repair to the Café La Florida, scramble up on one of the high stools and speak the following in a quavering voice, at the same time laying a Cuban twenty-cent piece on the till: "Dahme un Bacardi cocktail." The result, served in a chilled fluted glass, with its almost invisible encrustation of sugar syrup about the inside of the rim, is not only a beautiful thing to look at, having all the nobility and sunshine of the finest Rhein wine, but the gratitude expressed by the heat-tortured human senses, as it is taken into the system, defies description.

Up a flight of concrete stairs. Past a modern and busy office. Into a tiny room at the extreme end of the building.

The testing room, no doubt. Your eyes are ravished by the sight of a small but elegant bar replete with conventional brass adornments, polished glassware, a white-coated bar-tender, and all other fixtures . . . save only the cash register, which is pleasantly conspicuous by its very absinth . . . heh, heh ! (That's a rye one, but John Riddell gets away with no better.)

"We'll start with a rum cocktail," says the host.

Delightful tremors assail your gullet as the barman measures lime juice and rum, adds sugar, and strains into a bed of crushed ice, shakes triumphantly and emerges with a frosted silver mixer from which emerges, be still, oh fluttering glands ! a fragrant concoction, with the complexion and body of so much grapefruit juice, but the backhand drive of a Tilden.

"Here's to crime !" proposes your genial host.

A leer and a gurgle is your response.

That drink ! Will you ever forget it ? It rubs against your parched throat like a friendly kitten against the housemaid's knee . . .

Swiftly, cunningly, two more glasses are filled. At first you simply regarded the bar-tender as competent . . . but now you conceive a sudden feeling of deep regard for him. Emotions you thought must have been permanently blighted begin to take shape again.

"*Salud.*"

"*Pesetas,*" you respond fervently . . . "Or is it *frijoles* ?"

The time has now come for the social amenities. You begin to realize that you are in the presence of a very affable, witty, and hospitable fellow, indeed. There he stands beside you, beaming, dependable, and evidently well known and highly respected as a rumologist, judging by the respectful nods bestowed by various people who drift in for snifters.

"Our employees . . . they come in fradrink whenever spirit movezum . . . beer . . . rum . . . anything. On the house. An' they never overdo it."

"Overdo it? That's impossible, isn't it?"

The gallantry is not lost.

"Personally," confides the guide, "I knock loose at least one bottle of rum a day . . . been at it for eighteen years . . . esmy business."

I expressed my admiration in much the same shy voice a sandlotter might adopt with the mighty Babe.

"Snothing," is the modest rejoinder. "My wife meets me every evening with a rousin' rum punch."

The words caused us to turn as one man to the bar. Here's how they make it—now get this!

"As I wuz sayin' . . . you gotta tase it to 'prechate. Now this is our mos' pop'lar brand . . . tase it!"

You gulp down a generous snort of amber soothing syrup while your host regards you with a fatherly eye, holding another glass ready for you.

You reach for it wildly, but if you think it is some tonsil-soothing chaser you are in error.

"Now tase iswun . . . ten years old . . . ten years!"

Heavenly days, what a drink! Melted honey. Smooth as a ski jump. Fragrant as the south wind.

"How much a quart? How much?" you cry hoarsely. "I've gotta have some!"

This touches the host. He regards you approvingly and sways towards you.

"Sthaberries i'nit? Not juniper berries, either. . . ."

In your rush to make a note of that one you knock your glass off the bar, but it remains suspended in mid-air. Yet you distinctly hear it break.

"An ole Cuban cus'om," explains the guide, as he kicks the pieces under the rail.

The bar-tender says something in Spanish to your chum.

He turns to you in all humility. "Jus' think . . . I pretty nearly forgot to 'splain about our proon brandy . . . no, I'm not jokin'. . . . Here," he turns to the bar and seizes a decanter and a glass, "tase iss!"

He pours generously . . . lavishly.

"Proons soaked in rum for six months . . . good for what

ailsya. An' remember—no matter how young a proon may be iss always fullarinkles."

You both drink.

"Boy—don't that sober ya down, tho?"

On suspicion you have just one more. It does. You are ready now for whatever bludgeonings chance may be holding in store. Gravely you shake the hand of your friend.

"It was sure good of you to take me through the distillery, old man—it has been a real education."

"Sallrite." He fills your pockets with tiny bottles and decanters. "An' I tell you what... meet me here to-morrow morning an' I'll take you through the warehouse!"

Sixteen years ago, when I first beheld the glint of sunlight across the Caribbean, her rambling seaports sprawled profanely behind silver beaches consisted largely of drinking, whore- and Customs-houses. At the time, the former were of the greatest interest to me. As a rule they were adobe houses, with mud floors, and bedizened with liquor lithographs. Most of these were from England and Scotland, but some of the higher class establishments (with wooden floors and frame structures), whose proprietors catered to men who wore shoes, exhibited that most priceless of all American liquor posters—Custer's Last Stand.<sup>1</sup> Surely you have seen it. It is a model of horror, bloodshed, and butchery. Redskins fairly pop out at you, brandishing tomahawks and knives, ripping scalps off of writhing white men, sticking evil-looking blades into quivering flesh, revelling in blood. And in the very centre of this masterpiece we see General Custer himself standing in defiance, his long yellow hair flowing behind him (boy, what a scalp—and that's undoubtedly the idea). And even though it is obvious that the white race is taking a hell of a beating, still there's old General Custer still standing up and taking it. I guess that entitles any white man to stand up at the bar and do likewise.

<sup>1</sup> So effective was this poster that, to this day, I don't know what brand of liquor it advertises—worse luck! Anheuser-Busch would be my guess—but that's pure memory. No law-suits, please.

The lower type *cantina*, Government-owned as a rule, dealt in *aguardiente*, a local fermentation of sugar cane, colourless and therefore known variously as white eye or white mule, and guaranteed to stir the lust for blood in the most anæmic breast. One thing I'll say for white eye as against 'smoke' or any of the other raw hard liquors that poorer classes up north resort to—it doesn't poison a man—right away. He gets a play for his money. Before he loses the use of his optic nerve and the control of his nervous system he at least experiences a brief interlude in which he rises to the heights. Siegfried at his most pugnacious had nothing on Silfido after three shots of white eye. You've met Silfido, of course—everybody has who ever set foot on Caribbean soil. Sober, he is about five feet three, slender, flat- and bare-footed. His lower members are draped in a pair of shapeless cotton pants held about his thin waist with a piece of rope or a strip of cloth. Above he wears only a loose-fitting tunic made of the same material. On his head is perched a battered straw sombrero. The ensemble is liberally spattered with banana stains, as though iodine had been poured all over him. The most interesting characteristic of Silfido by far is his face. It is an Indian face, sharp-featured, with the clear bronze skin tightly drawn down over prominent cheek-bones, to the point of a sharp chin. His eyes are Spaniel brown, lustrously lashed, honest, and affectionate. Now we behold Silfido entering the 'Adios Amour' *cantina* with the equivalent of half a dollar in silver clutched in one hand, while loosely held in the other is the ubiquitous machete—a blade two or three feet in length with which he earns his living, chops his wood, cleans his fish, and pares his nails. . . . Half an hour passes and once more we behold our hero. This time his hat is askew, the straight black hair hangs over his forehead, and his black eyes shine with murderous intent.

"Yow-e-e-e!" he greets the world, rising on his toes like a rooster about to greet the dawn. At the same time he brandishes his blade in a wicked arc, striking the flat of the metal against whatever comes his way and producing a ringing challenge to the world. Fascist or Communist—*carajo!*



take either side! give him an argument or not, Silfido is there to fight. Locomotor ataxia is already setting in as he staggers uncertainly forward, but he picks his path right up the middle of the street, cutting a wide swathe, and unless the beneficent Deity sees fit to close those blazing Indian eyes in slumber before he comes in contact with the enemy there is going to be some bloodshed.<sup>1</sup>

Consider now the saloons throughout the Caribbean that cater to people who wear shoes (that matter of wearing shoes is an important index to society): Here one will find imported liquors; vermouthe, gins, whiskies, beer. Patrons consist of native planters, merchants, and sailors. The proprietor as a rule tends bar while his Señora runs a kitchen in the back and serves substantial native type food on short order. Then comes the really 'toney' establishment for the resident whites. 'Jack's Place,' we will call it. There are tables, chairs, and a wide selection of liquors and brandies, including the colourful syrupy liqueurs such as orange, apricot, and cherry brandy, *crème de menthe*, *crème de cacao*—and even absinthe. There is usually a place to dance where the village whores may congregate. Music is supplied by battered phonographs and usually, but not always, there will be several strictly non-paying slot machines. As a rule, there will be a big back room where the white men can congregate and roll dice. Scotch whisky is the leading drink, taken with seltzer and ice if available, otherwise with water—or in the case of show-offs—straight. Poker dice whose six faces are stamped 9-10-J-Q-K-A are used in the famous tropical games of elimination. High man gets out, then second and so forth until there are only two left. Then these two roll it out 'horse and horse' until one is eliminated and one is stuck.

<sup>1</sup> The nearest approach to this behaviourism, anthropologically speaking, that I have ever witnessed is the action of the Moros down in Mindinao who have a religious formula which causes them to bind the prominent muscles of their arms and legs with thongs and then to sally forth with their wicked two-handled knives (so sharp that the blade is kept encased in two parallel slabs of wood until it makes its first cut) dedicated to the belief that they must kill and kill until they too meet death violently, at which time they will proceed to their Valhalla.

Then the loser signs a chit, starts afresh, and another round appears.

Do you think that we *Norte Americanos* know anything about the *real* inside of tropical drinking? Just look over the prosaic names of the liquors brewed and consumed by the white race and compare it with any one of the vast number of exotic beverages knocked off by our voodoo neighbours in the South. Gentlemen, I give you *arrancame la vida*. Its components? Raw alcohol, sugar syrup, lemon, and mumbo jumbo. Its title in English: 'Tear my life from me!' Gentlemen, I give you Rio's most famous beverage, consumed in the cafés flanking the mosaic tilings designed to represent the undulations of the sea: Mother-in-Law's Eyes (ingredients unknown—even to the bar-tenders)!

It's the mixtures that really get you: tropical men are inclined, by experience, to stick to scotch-and-soda, but there are those who *will* go in for gin tonica laced with native rum and equal parts of Italian vermouth, white eye, port, and burgundy . . . known as *Tres Torpedos*.

One thing practically any tropical man (or traveller unfortunate to be there at the time) can tell you: the fireworks of our Fourth of July and Central America's September Fifteenth (both Independence Days) are no more spectacular than the pyrotechnics that go on behind his own eyeballs at such times. All of us have seen the rockets which zoom into the heavens and produce spray after spray of colourful lights. But what are these man-made demonstrations compared to what Mother Nature does after celebrating these historic occasions? One reclines and closes his eyes. At once the sparklers commence, followed by the pinwheels and eventually by alcoholic sky rockets. What a dazzling spectacle! Blup! There's a fan of *crème de menthe* against the velvet sky. Blup—there's a batch of orange bitters! Blup—here comes the cherry brandy! Shucks—we might as well return the scotch-and-soda and be done with it. . . . Sorry, but that's the way it is!

Despite all that has been said about the evils of drink and especially how drinking is the ruination of white men in

southern waters, I still cannot help but survey the scene and conclude that there is more hilarity and release in it than harm. True, I have seen men come down to the tropics and set to work to lap up everything in sight in the shortest possible time. I have seen them stick doggedly to this ambition, even years after they must have realized its futility. If such determination could only have been harnessed to a worthwhile cause, there is no telling to what heights these people might have scaled ! Such cases, however, are infrequent and probably those who consecrated their lives to the consumption of booze down there would eventually have done the same up here—provided they could get it. Mostly, though, the men and women who live and work in the tropics drink moderately. If there is a party or a dance or a pay-day night to celebrate, everybody goes to it. People get as silly in Cristobal as they do in New Rochelle, but comes the dawn as inevitably in the Caribbean as it does across Long Island Sound. Headaches, medication, and vows of eternal sobriety follow in routine order and then it's "back to the farm, there'll be no drink to-day !"

I'll admit that this tolerant philosophy of drink is a detached one that has come after years of mellowing. Certainly I would never have been the author of such back in 1922, that historic November eve when Doc Parsons came clopping into our farm-yard with—of all things—two bottles of French Vermouth. Doc was Overseer of a new-land farm about, twelve kilometres farther up the line and it was a tribute to his gregariousness and generosity that he chose to ride all the way down simply to share this slop with us rather than consume it in moody solitude as the dusk crept in about him in his lonely jungle fastness.

"Get out some glasses ! Haul up some chairs ! Break out some bottle-openers !" He slammed the bottles on the table and flung himself into the nearest chair, hoisting his spurred boots on to the black oil cloth table-cover. "Old José Martinez—you remember him—used to be contractor of your farm before he bumped off that Jamaican foreman—remember? Well, he shot Dolores, damn his eyes. Dolores was the best

cook in the district. Only way José could square himself was to bring me this stuff from San Pedro."

French Vermouth ! Ugh ! And warm French Vermouth ! And not good French Vermouth either ! Fortunately there was a crock of white eye in the house and the mixture, without ice naturally, but plus the juice of a couple of oranges, was happier than might have been expected. At least it did the job : it brought release to inhibited impulses. The result was that Doc got bragging about his prowess as a pistol shot from the hip. Night had fallen and one of the two bottles had long since been dispatched. The other, still resplendent in its virginal trappings, stood enticingly on the table under the foul-smelling kerosene light which spluttered under its consignment of moths. The only other objects on the table were the two Parson feet.

" See tha bo'l ? " he mumbled, indicating the pristine French Vermouth beside his right foot. " Washis ! "

Wham ! He whipped out that six-gun and let drive before we could even duck. You never saw so many toes scattered around in your life. It wasn't funny either, for although Dod was well anæsthetized our medical supplies were primitive and we had quite a siege keeping the rest of his foot for him until the surgeon could get to us.

What truth is there in the pretty little figment about white men lying around lapping up gin on tropical beaches ? What truth is there in the alcoholic assertions of Richard Harding Davis and O. Henry and held up to the public behind Hollywood's magnifying glass ever since ? There isn't any. I'll admit that I did know one Consul who used to celebrate the arrival of passenger ships so energetically that when the time came for the Purser to call at the Consulate for his clearance papers the representative of the State Department could not be aroused. And if aroused he couldn't sign his name anyway—that's the way it got him. The Purser, however, was an ingenious chap and *persona grata*, so all he did was proceed to the Consul's bathroom and return with a sheet of tissue by which he then traced the Consul's signature and thence reproduced it on the ship's papers.

I've seen lots of double-fisted drinking down there, but perhaps the most amusing incident in that connection that occurs to me is that of a man we hired as a Time-keeper. As with all other big corporations, we used an employment form asking a lot of impertinent questions and the particular one read as follows :

Q. Do you use intoxicating beverages ; if so, to what extent ?

Our hero replied naïvely to the above as follows :

A. Yes—occasionally ; about a quart at a time.

Nevertheless we employed this man because of his excellent agricultural background in the onion fields of Texas. He claimed to be an irrigation engineer—and that was putting it mildly.

He lived up to his word all right. ' JOHNNY LABEL BLACK WATER ' was not only his favourite drink, but that was the way he ordered it. (And if he didn't get it he would accuse the bartender of adding 'insult to injury'.) And not by the drink either ! I recall the day when three of us rode to his farm to prepare him for the long trip to seaport where he, together with a few other privileged members, was to be inducted into the thirty-second Masonic degree by a visiting Mason of high office. He already had lip to bottle when we arrived. He was a big man physically—robust—good-humoured—and the Lord had equipped him with the most extraordinary set of pores I have ever beheld in a human body. It was a veritable sprinkler system. As fast as we would swab off the surface and get him into a fresh suit of B.V.D.'s he would tip another snort out of the bottle and within two minutes he would be wringing wet. Lon Chaney in his foulest suit of crumpled white linen sloshing about Hollywood's conception of the catacombs of Paris could not possibly have presented a more gruesome appearance than did this man when he presented himself for fraternal and spiritual comfort.

Down in Costa Rica the boys and girls from the far north have long been famed for their ability to toss 'em off and come up singing ! They were a hardy group and not lacking in



Sugar cane in Jamaica to-day becomes rum to-morrow. And the favourite drink of the Island since the days of Henry Morgan has been Planter's Punch. Here's the recipe: one sour, two sweet, three strong, and four weak. Get yourself a bottle, a glass, some citrons, sugar—and try to figure it out.









Be it snook, trout, amber jack, or wahoo—it's still fish and these dark ladies of Jamaica know just what to do about it.

creative instinct. They are responsible for a drinking song that has become a classic. If you've ever visited Costa Rica and stood at the rail as your ship slipped out into the jadeite harbour from the pier at Puerto Limon you must have heard them singing it to their departing friends. And, once heard, that rollicking tune can never be forgotten. A few of the expurgated lyrics are set forth just to give you an idea of the tropical man's attitude toward the freedom of drink :

I learned to drink my likker  
Way down in Costa Rica,  
Way down upon the Spanish Ma-a-in,  
We drink our scotch at Beaver's,  
It keeps away the fevers,  
An' it ain't nobody's business what I do.

Oh, what I do, Oh, what I do,  
Oh, it ain't nobody's business what I do,  
Way down in Costa Rica  
That's where I learned to drink my likker,  
An' it ain't nobody's business what I do.

I've got a girl by the name of Sally,  
She doesn't live down in our alley,  
She's not the kind you read about in song ;  
She thinks I'm mighty speedy,  
That's why I am poor and needy  
An' it ain't nobody's business what I do.

Oh, what I do, etc.

Everybody's talking 'bout me,  
They say I get mighty tipsy,  
Hepping up the highballs every day,  
But I don't give a damn for who sets  
I'm the gal from Massachusetts  
An' it ain't nobody's business what I do.

Oh, what I do, etc.

Whisky won't hurt this baby,  
Morphine won't drive me crazy,  
Dancing won't put me in my grave,  
For I learned to drink my likker  
Way down in Costa Rica  
An' it ain't nobody's business what I do.

One classification of the genus tropical saloon not previously mentioned is that which disguises itself behind the name of 'club.' The West Indies teems with clubs. Every city, every hamlet in the interior has its various clubs. Each consists of a bar and a credit system—around which nuclei are appended whatever additional adjuncts express the purpose and personality of the club. Thus, a yacht club would have, first a bar, and second a credit system—then a locker-room, shower facilities, dining-room, dancing pavilion, and last but not least, a rickety little runway projecting out into the ocean, against which a yacht could conceivably nestle if there happened to be one. So in the case of a golf club, one can usually find a nine-hole course lurking somewhere in the outskirts. The same goes for tennis, handball, and dancing. But the greatest number of tropical clubs are simply social in character, and that means practically all bars.

There are clubs housed in buildings of surprising magnificence in Havana, Caracas, Barranquilla, and inland capitals such as Bogota, San José de Costa Rica, San Salvador, and Guatemala City. But these are few and far between compared to the endless number of huts, shacks, frame buildings, and unpretentious houses where groups meet for the dual purpose of getting away from home and putting their drinks on the cuff!

One man's highball is another man's mouthwash—I admit that. But it has long been my thesis that despite the proximity of drink wherever you may turn in the tropics, this business of a white man gradually 'going native' is not really to be charged off against John Barleycorn. A white man in the tropics must either make physical and moral adjustments with his nature and his conscience, or go home—or die. Let's consider the case history of Bill Moreland, Williams '21, who sailed for Honduras on the same ship that carried me south. Bill was a good athlete, second string baseball, and tennis man, tolerably good drinker—in that he had learned not to mix gin and Scotch—clean in body and mind, interested in girls only to the point of playing around—a virgin if you

care to put it that way, and crammed to the craw with cherished American ideals about making good by hewing to the line and never 'yessing' his superiors. In other words, just a regular sort of a guy with above average background.

It took the tropics about two years to 'get' Bill.

Both Bill and I faced the tropics with amused detachment during our first weeks. We kidded a lot about the moving picture stencils of the White Cargo school—pictures which showed clean-cut lads arriving at the rubber plantations, and then quite inexplicably consorting with brown-skinned girls, discarding shaving kits and shoes and bathing, and positively not after gin right out of the square head. We both got a whale of a kick out of going into the *cantinas* and making out that our hands were so unsteady that we slopped our ponies of whisky all over the table pouring them into the high-ball glasses. Then one night we saw a white derelict whose nerves were so shot that he had to borrow a hand towel from the *dueño*, put it around his neck and only by keeping it taut between his hands could he guide palsied fingers down to hisigger of rum, and thence to piteously quivering lips. We quit clowning about jittery drinkers right there.

Never a month passed, but what Bill would ride from his banana farm down to mine with some popular magazine containing a tropical story in which the central character underwent a subtle change in character for no reason other than the fact that he was stationed near the Equator. Shoes and morals would go by the board, whisky would be poured with shaking, but lavish hand, and the bungalow would be live with luscious native girls who called him 'bay-bee.'

"What the hell is it all about?" Bill would gripe. "Where do these authors who know too much about plot structure and not enough about physical geography get the licence to have their men go to pot just because there's a grove of coconuts in the back yard? Where's *my* brown mamma? Where's *my* beard? How come *I* still wear shoes? Why can't *I* achieve the shaky hand?"

Bill got pretty drunk one pay-day night. He played poker and drank close to a quart of whisky. It rained the next day

and he had to ride his mule twelve kilometres through the drizzle without a coat. You know how a man needs water after a session like that. Well, Bill was green and he didn't know any better than to drink out of a creek along the trail.

They called it black-water fever. Anyway it batted his ears down. First he got the jaundice. Even his eyeballs went yellow. Honestly. The yellow stain oozed right out of him and even stained his clothing. He stuck to the job until it got to the point that his stomach couldn't tolerate the black beans and tortillas and rice that we all lived on. He said he would give his last dime for a grapefruit or a glass of orange juice. The thought of crisp green lettuce nearly maddened him. But the delicacies his system craved were not to be had down in the jungles of Honduras.

Finally we had to 'phone headquarters for the hospital car. Bill was delirious by that time. He was running a high fever and was vomiting bile. It was terrible the way the fever racked his body. When the chills would come they would shake the bed just as though a couple of strong-arm men were standing at the foot, worrying it. And when the hot spells followed, he would sweat right through the mattress.

Bill lost twenty pounds and never amounted to a damn as a tennis player thereafter. They had him in the hospital nearly a month. And when he finally came back to his job he had that white-lipped, ascetic look that you see in the faces of so many tropical men.

It was a source of acute embarrassment to Bill that for a long time he couldn't even sign his name. His nervous system toned up in time, of course, but even to this day if he drinks too much his hands get so shaky he can hardly pour his drinks or sign his chits.

Every pay-day Bill used to go on quite a tear. Maybe he'd knock off a quart of whisky in a twenty-four-hour session. His system got pretty used to it and there was an alcoholic resistance set up there. Once in a while, he'd so far forget himself as to go sophomore and ride furiously through his farm in the moonlight, whooping it up with the younger and wilder members of our colony, each of whom would go on

these midnight rides armed to the teeth, and with plenty of bottled reserve in the saddle-bags. Occasionally Bill would go to see Theresa.

But Bill learned moderation. He got his release from drink—but that's about all. Yes, that angular party you see standing there on the pier, inspecting bananas, is Bill Moreland, Williams '21. Yes, that's a three-day stubble on his chin. Yes, he has worn that pair of khaki trousers and that stained white shirt a day or so longer than indicated by the laws of sanitation. Yes, he has girl friends who are brown and habits he isn't writing home about. But there are plenty of us, hanging wistfully over the rail as our ship churns her green-and-white mosaic in the bay, wishing we had the courage to lead Bill Moreland's kind of life; wishing we could slough off our responsibilities and share some of his adventures and enjoy the independent, if lonely, life that is his. If the tropics has really 'got him' . . . boy, bring a double whisky-and-soda—and here! tear up this steamer ticket!

## *For Social Workers Only*

NEXT to climatic conditions, I suppose vice is the most predominating characteristic in Tropical America—at least as far as the travelling public is concerned. By vice I do not mean *viciousness*—brutality, torture, depravity, ‘contributing to the moral delinquency of minors,’ rape, dope, and all that sort of thing. What I mean is prostitution.

In North America sustained efforts have been made in the larger cities to legislate this age-old profession out of existence. Of course, it has not succeeded, but it has broken up red light districts that were formerly segregated, thereby causing diseased and immoral professionals to take to cover. The result is that these people become distributed over a wide area instead of being concentrated in one spot under licence and observation.

In the tropics this enlightened attitude has fortunately not taken hold. The districts are still there in any town you happen to visit. Naturally, these districts get a big play from the casual visitor out to satisfy an appetite or a curiosity, or both.

It is only those foreigners who live in Tropical America who learn that there is a great deal more to prostitution as practised there than meets the eye. *Immorality in the Caribbean is not vicious*—it is natural, full of pathos and laughter and companionship. Bear in mind that the whites who live in the West Indies are, generally speaking, men without mates. And if there was ever a section of the world where a man needs a woman, it is in this hothouse zone. Look at the richness of all growing things; the astonishing degree of fruitfulness; the infinite range of colour that fairly drips from Nature’s palette; the riotous vegetation; the jungles alive with insects, birds, butterflies, monkeys, snakes, and all

manner of living things that once teemed through the original garden of Eden. Don't tell me that there's not plenty of plant pollination going on there. Don't tell me that a New England hollyhock, transplanted into a Nicaraguan jungle, wouldn't soon get into the spirit of the thing (or die). Don't tell me that the fishes and amphibians are not spawning in the seas, inland waterways, rushing rivers, and still lagoons. Nor that the insects, reptiles and animals breed with anything like the seasonal restriction of our specimens up north. Remember—in the tropics it is always endless summer; wet some of the time, dry some of the time, but always there is food and drink—and companionship.

Look at the early adolescence of the natives; the full bosoms, rounded limbs, sensuous lips, and ardent eyes of the thirteen-year-olds. Look at the child-mothers. Look at any plaza in any *pueblo* any night, and see the young men and women, one sex parading clockwise about the band stand, the other parading counter-clockwise. And why? An old Spanish custom? To be sure. But don't forget that it enables lovers to meet and smile and pass—and meet again.

Mating is in the tropic air, and the white man who persists in 'saving himself for the girl up yonder' is just inviting a visit from the psychiatrist—provided he sticks the life down below. Yes, evidence shows that it is safe to say that those who abstain from feminine companionship pay dearly for their abstinence. They need women—they need the spiritual and sexual communion with women which Nature implanted in them and which is brought to flower to an astonishing degree in hot, humid climates.

Now the social set-up down there is such that it is very difficult for a white man, particularly one lacking the social graces, the knowledge of customs and language and the acquaintanceship, to meet, know, and marry the women of the native aristocracy. This is one angle that Hollywood has covered pretty correctly in its portrayal of Latin América. His business of having to be introduced to a young lady of social background under the most restricted conditions, the barred window, the ever-watchful *dueña*, the constant presence



of the family and all that, is so. Naturally, men on the loose turn to less restricted social strata for their women. And, as with the *gente decente*, so too they have little chance to meet the working girl because she hurries home to her own family in the evening; tired, poor, undernourished, badly dressed, quite frequently unwashed—and the opportunities there are obviously few. Besides, there is always the angle of indignant parents, pregnancy, shotgun weddings, and all that. All this explains the sociological significance of the red light district in the tropics.

Sex in Havana—the headline Caribbean city in terms of immorality—is a brazen, matter-of-fact business. It exists merely to cater to the traveller. A man can soon find his social and economic level, and in general his money will bring him just about what he might expect in his own home town. If he's a sailor with a quarter, he may expect to find some strapping African willing to accommodate him behind six sacks of sugar on the wharf. If he has a dollar, it is not difficult to find a woman with a cot in a crib. So it goes—two dollars, five, ten, or twenty.

The same applies in the Canal Zone, as well as other large Caribbean ports. It is all very blowsy, very sordid, and strictly commercial and has no place in the issue at hand.

It is only when you live in or near one of the smaller or more remote ports of the Caribbean that this subject of prostitution really takes on sociological importance. Even the villages have their districts. Yes, even the *pueblos* consisting of a few thatched huts have their girls who are willing to offer their bodies and their companionship to lonely men. But it is done in such a naïve way. Take the case of that girl we young banana pioneers knew back in the days when we were riding the plantations in Guanchia, in the interior of Honduras. While gathering material for this chapter I wrote to one of my friends about the 'Guanchia Kid,' as we called her, and I received the following nostalgic gem of understatement about her:

'I had forgotten the Guanchia Kid until you mentioned her. Now I am reminded of the terrific struggles and the

torture the Kid went through every pay-day when she went to town. The Kid had a corset, a lovely thing, actually three sizes too small for her over-ample carcass. When she got ready to hit the trail she would go down to the river, assiduously scrub herself, put on her best cotton slip and then summon all hands—the Overseer, the Timekeeper, the yard boy, cook, and stockman. This personnel would then wrap the Kid up like a piece of pork in a tortilla, pushing and cramming as much of her anatomy as possible within the limitations of the corset and then begin to haul in on the lines, bracing their feet on the Kid's frame as they heaved and struggled. The Kid would exhale as far as possible, at which time a few more inches of slack would be taken up on the strings. Then the Kid would have to inhale and part of the gain would be lost. Once more the Kid would wheeze and eventually become satisfactorily strait-jacketed. Finally, with her insides so cramped that she couldn't bend, she'd disappear on high heels, wobbling uncertainly through the bananas, headed for the nearest railway station, returning three days later with rings beneath her eyes, her corset beneath her arm, and plenty of crumpled bills in her stocking.'

Another case for the sociologist is that of the girl Theresa who lived in one of these little interior towns and was known to be the village Jezebel. Her house was of thatch, the floor was dirt, and her bed was a hammock. She had two baby girls who were the sweetest-natured children I have ever seen. Should a man choose to gallop up to her house, tie his animal to the post, and pay his respects, Theresa would obligingly bid him welcome, calmly remove the whimpering or sleeping children from the hammock and put them on the floor, and then extend the questionable hospitality of her hammock to the client. A fine physical specimen was Theresa—buxom, sand-coloured, with dark, lustrous eyes and long, straight, black hair. She could use the dollar or so, to be sure—but she loved for the joy of loving. She gave herself freely, without compunction, and without the criticism of her fellows in the village, result being that she was a superbly healthy, uninhibited female.

Still another case worthy of documentation is that of a Mestiza girl who had but one dress—a pale blue silk garment crusty with sweat and trimmed with silver beads which rattled. Queer oyster-coloured eyes, she had, slightly slanted, almond-shaped, and silken black hair cut in a Dutch bob. Hers was a lithe, tan-shaded body that would have done credit to Diana. This one was a huntress too : when her ‘ Psst . . . come here, Slim ’ cut out at a victim from her doorway, it stopped a man as definitely as though he had come smack up against a wall. Nobody seemed to know her name or nationality—she was a mysterious mongrel type—backwash of distant lands and breeds, blood of Egypt and India perhaps—flung up against the topless tangled jungles—lost to her people and her customs and herself in this lonely, lost eddy of timelessness.

The point of all this is that white men in the tropics turn to the districts for social relationship, not only because it's the one place they can find women, not only to satisfy their sexual hunger, but, more importantly, because around these tables, on these dance floors, on the many stoops that flank these streets, they find laughter and music and friendliness. There is no furtive rapping on darkened doors, no opening of peep-holes or whispered exchange of passwords. *Carajo no !* There is nothing to be ashamed of. Everybody goes there and motives are neither questioned nor misunderstood. A man does not need to spend a penny if he doesn't want to. Or he can set up a couple of rounds of *crème de menthe* for the girls and buy himself and his party a few highballs. He is not expected or requested to take any girl out back or upstairs, she does not hound him for money, there is no criticism either outspoken or implied to the effect that he is taking up her time—none of this hurry-up stuff. Nor is he doped and robbed, as lonely strangers are in our great centres of civilization !

In the early hoodlum days when white men were pioneering, it was not uncommon for an Engineer or a Timekeeper or Contractor to get himself liquored up and gallop his horse

into one of these houses. He could usually count upon some gay and reckless gal to enter into the Lady Godiva spirit with him, and more than once I have seen a naked brown girl with long black hair streaming down her back, bouncing uncomfortably on the pommel of a McClellan saddle as the white rider piloted his bell-mouthed mare through the main streets of some *pueblo*. The high point of this violation of the sanctity of the district came one night when a man rode his animal not only into the bar-room but through it, up a tickety flight of stairs and thence along the balcony above. Here were located the rooms of some five or six girls. Those of us below could follow the progress of our hero not only by the sound of his horse as stumbling clumsily from one room to the next his rider went in search of a naked partner for the grand descent, but also by the premonitory sagging of roof boards as the big hoofs stamped against the floor. It was at the George Washington *cantina*, as I recall, that all this happened. And it was when a hundred and fifty pound girl by the name of America sprang from her bed to the saddle that the inevitable occurred. The law of universal gravitation was not to be denied—not even under these most patriotic circumstances. Rider, animal, and girl came crashing and thundering through the ceiling, landing in an indescribable mess of laths, blood, and boards in the middle of the floor!

What is the appearance of a typical room inhabited by a typical girl in the game? As a rule, it will be a room whose partitions do not reach entirely to the ceiling, thus improving the circulation of air. This means that there is no great privacy, but that is inconsequential. As a rule, the white man does not go into a girl's room for any purpose except business, as her ordinary social activities are usually confined to the dance floor, the bar-room, the street, or the beach. And when he is in a room with a girl the conversation is usually limited because he probably speaks but little Spanish and she less English. The walls are of unfinished wood, decorated with cheap lithographs of Miller's 'The Reaper' or a Swiss

lake in a bamboo frame. There will be a table, with a wash basin in the corner, a couple of religious prints, an assortment of rotogravure sheets from popular moving picture magazines, possibly some *Saturday Evening Post* covers tacked to the wall. There will be a ghastly Chinese screen partially concealing the bed or cot and there will be a beaded *portière* with Oriental symbols. No self-respecting prostitute's room will be complete without a Singer sewing machine (even mud-floored thatched huts with no furniture except discarded soap boxes and grass woven hammocks will boast a Singer sewing machine—it is the most astonishing tribute to North American sales persistence that I have ever seen) and a battered phonograph.

Quite frequently the whites fall in love with one of these girls. Take our friend Theresa for example: there was a fine-looking, healthy, ardent woman with not a wile in her mind or body. She was honest, reasonably clean, and if it so happened that she responded to a man to the degree of wanting him on a steady basis, that was all there was to it. True, she would still have her clientele to take care of, at least until her man was prepared to support her. She would still have her hours in the hammock, she would still have her babies to suckle and wash. But outside of business hours and apart from her necessities she would make the man a splendid companion. As his mistress she would proudly walk by his side in the plaza at night, both would be recognized and respected—and it was not uncommon for the gallantry to go beyond this point. Quite frequently her friends and his would so respect the affair that other men would discontinue seeing her and other women would not welcome his attentions, if he were still inclined to extra-curricular activities. This proved to be bad economics in many cases. But it illustrates the simplicity of the sex situation in Central America. Nor are these liaisons entirely or even largely given to sex. There is a great deal of social intercourse involved—happy hours spent together on the beach, swimming in the surf, arranging and presiding at barbecue parties, dancing and at song-fests. Relationships such as this lead to a deeply sympathetic attitude

between the races. They lead to a marvellous education in language and custom. They keep many young, love-hungry white men satisfied and normal. Any student of the situation who can free himself of the bias of our own artificial convention must surely see this. There is nothing evil about it !

## *Spanish Music! Spanish Music!*

WHENEVER I encounter verses in books that are printed to illustrate local artistic or cultural trends, I always skip them—particularly when they are translations. Suppose, for instance, an intelligent Brazilian in Rio encountered the following in a piece about North Americans and their passion for extemporaneous bellowing over the bar:

“Down by the old stream by the mill,  
Where I first met you,  
There for the first time I realized  
That I was in love.”

Who cares?

Or who cares what happens to the old cowhand by the Rio Grande, or the aspect of the moonlight on the Wabash, or the fact that the gears were stripped on the merry-go-round? And, of course, the same goes for those gooey Spanish lyrics in translation.

Nevertheless, there is something about Spanish music and Spanish lyrics, *au naturel*, that, once injected into the bloodstream of the Northerner, sticks there just as stubbornly as malaria. I recall one night at Tela, Honduras, when a gang of us boarded a banana boat for a party, and a native came into the smoking-room along with a group of his own people. One thing led to another and after several rounds this man stood up and started to sing *Cielito Lindo* (Little Heaven). Well, he had us all moist-eyed before he finished—and it wasn't that Johnny Walker either. Such a lilting baritone that man had—such an effortless rise and fall of intonation—and such power. He could have been singing in Arabic and yet

all of us would have sensed the passion and the sentiment in that song !

Everybody has a guitar and a phonograph in the tropics. And, lest we feel that our own popular music enjoys an international coverage, permit me to suggest that you wander down any gay street in any Latin city at night and listen to the phonographs. It is not the music of Gershwin, Berlin, or Yellen that you hear, but rather those melodic progressions compounded out of Africa and Cuba. Rudy Vallee introduced 'The Peanut Vendor' up here and it was a sensational success. This rhumba rhythm is but one of countless that the Latins know and love, and that those of us who have lived there have also come to know and love. All these rhumba pieces owe their success to the beat, the adept use of the maracas, drums, and the wailing voice. Cuban Pete—king of the rhumba beat—with his chick-chickey ban, chick-chickey ban, will give you the idea. There is something about them so reminiscent of voodoo, of drums beating up the misty valley, of dark-skinned men and women prancing around the bonfire, that once known and understood can never be forgotten.

Next to the rhythmic pieces come the Latin love songs. These are the laments of ardent men who stand beneath dim, cloistered windows, singing in the moonlight with faces upturned to lustrous-eyed señoritas with magnolias in their hair. There is nothing of the innuendo in these love songs, there is no double-entendre, no smut—they are all sung from the heart, rich with feeling and highly moving in their music. There is all the anguish and pathos of the ages in these songs. Never have I encountered such perfect co-ordination of lyric and score. Undoubtedly they stem from old folk songs spontaneously conceived from the heart. If you want to get your heart torn out by the roots, ask your Victrola man for *Mi Princesita*, *Mi Querido Capitan*, *La Golandrina*, and *Mi Viejo Amor*.

Then finally come the songs that I consider equivalent to our nursery rhymes and Rounds. *La Cucaracha* is a good example. Here is the simple little story of a cockroach who couldn't make the grade because his legs were weak in the



knees. Then there is the one about the ten little puppies who lose their lives one by one, verse by verse, falling into pots of oil, breaking their necks in swinging doors, choking on biscuits, and so forth until all ten have met unique and horrible deaths. And there's *Ai Mama Inez* which everybody knows.

The Latins are not strong on group singing. They will respond to a song if somebody leads it and the responses are immediately known. But ordinarily they prefer to sit back and listen—absorbing rather than exuding music. And such is the poignant quality of their music that it can readily be appreciated what good medicine this is. I cannot help but contrast our own perspiring and ruddy faces gathered about the beer mugs and piano, bellowing out protestations of undying fealty ('For It's Always Fair Weather When Good Fellows Get Together') as contrasted to the quiet gatherings of the Latins listening to one of their members or to a phonograph record, their lustrous eyes glowing as they sit there drinking it in. Furthermore, it has been my observation that our own barber shop quartets quickly fall into this Latin custom once the delight of Spanish music casts its enchanting spell upon them.

If it's night time in the tropics, the combination of moonlight splashing over palm fronds, across adobe houses and thatched roofs and the fragrance of *frangipane*, supplemented by lilting music of Mexico, Cuba, or Costa Rica, makes a man feel as though he were indeed in the land of make-believe. Whatever is mean and dingy and dirty is miraculously transformed in the moonlight; whatever is rotten or reeks to the high heavens is more than overcome by the glorious fragrance of the trade wind fresh from the sea, and the fragrance of the night blooms; whatever of nostalgia and loneliness is eating out your heart is suddenly swept clean out of consciousness by the strains of seductive Spanish music.

BOOK TWO

# Banana Escapades



## *Exit the Tropical Tramp*

SOME time before dawn the steamer edged into her berth at the dock. This was my getting-off place and I was at the rail eager for the mists to lift and give me the first view of what I thought would be my new home. Tela, Honduras—as glorious a half-moon of perfect silver and bordered by graceful palms as ever welcomed a jaded eye. There wasn't a single discordant note. It was an open roadstead flanked on the right by an outcropping of rocks through whose interstices screamed the gulls and frigate birds, then that graceful sickle of sand bounded on the left by an escarpment beyond which lay—*quien sabe?* Directly overhead an orderly procession of pelicans winged their mournful way, never varying a hair's breadth from their perfect formation, each craning his neck to right or left, bright-eyed for unsuspecting fish, just as the leader did. And just as the Staff Commander of an aeroplane detachment might suddenly sick over his 'plane and drop a thousand feet in a breathtaking vertical, followed in order by his subordinates, so did Mr. Number One Pelican flick up his tail and plummet head first, beak forward, into the waves and into a succulent school of needle fish, followed in precisely the same order and with the same sort of discipline by the others. Each salted down a goodly portion of fish in his pouch, I was happy to note.

The pelican is an appealing repository of sea food. He has dignity, he has bulk, he looks as though he had sensitive feelings. I can imagine someone telling a pelican to get the hell out of his fish compound and actually wounding the fowl by his words. And speaking of wounding pelicans, there's a reprehensible practice employed by the black Carib boys down in the tropics. First they secure a large piece of balsam

wood—very light in weight, porous, and resilient—to which they attach a long fish line and on which they nail one reasonably fresh fish. With these boards they then swim well out into the bay, floating them there and then returning, paying out the line as they return to shore. Patiently then they squat in the shallows in the early morning waiting for the inevitable procession of pelicans on their matutinal rounds. Sometimes when visibility is not too good these birds fall for the deception, plunge downward, and with their beaks, encounter not only the fish but also the board. Naturally they become pinned there, beak through board, powerless to release themselves despite their terrific wing-fluttering struggles as the lines are hauled in.

How unlike Barrios. So clean, so cool, so untouched by human hands. I could hardly wait to get my things ashore and through the Customs to take up my duties as Timekeeper on a banana plantation that I presumed in my youthful ignorance must lie just behind those mountains that rimmed the shore. I reported to the office and was put aboard a train and told not to get off until it came to the end of the line. That was a mere ninety miles and I did not see the beautiful sand and turquoise waters of Tela for nearly three years !

Gates was his last name, nobody ever did seem to know his given name. We gave him one ourselves : General. All I knew about him then, and that's all I know about him now, is that he reported to my banana farm in Honduras one scorching noon, riding the outbound freight train. The superintendent had 'phoned me from port saying that this man Gates had applied to him for a job saying he was stranded *en route* from nowhere in particular to nowhere in general, that he couldn't speak a word of Spanish, had never seen a banana outside a grocery store, but was a big rangy chap with an engaging manner and it would be in order to put him on the pay-roll as Timekeeper at seventy-five dollars a month. This was in 1922. White drifters in those days had little trouble landing jobs—and good ones—jobs that led some-

where. Nor were records of past activities any too closely scrutinized. The men empowered to ask questions had been in identical positions themselves not so many years earlier and they were still not keen on investigations. Bar-room brawls, quick tempers, blazing guns—and the border; such would not make pretty reading in a personnel report. We all knew that.

I didn't ask Gates anything about his past. He vouchsafed that he had left a wife and three kids in Detroit, why, he didn't say, although in a moment of drunken emotion he showed me their photograph, and a nice-looking group they were.

He was a strapping six-foot-three, dressed in khaki shirt, five-gallon hat, Mexican spurs, riding-pants, and leggings— a sensible enough outfit, all but the spurs. His legs were so long there wasn't a riding animal in the bleeding parish tall enough to keep his feet from dragging!

"When do we eat, boss?" was his first remark as he bone-crushed my hand in his tremendous five-fingered wrench, his breath reminiscent of an overflowing alcohol-amp.

"Now," I said shortly, "and then you're going to the corral and pick a riding animal and get the hell out on the farm. It's burning up and there are two hundred men fighting fire, on whom a record must be kept. Go grab yourself some beans, then get a note-book and pencil in the office downstairs and don't let me see you around here before dark." And he slammed out to get to work again, trying to block the advance of a terrific wall of flame that had devoured thousands of acres of our dried banana land, and which was whipped up every afternoon afresh as the daily trades came booming down the valley.

I didn't see him around before dark. I didn't see him around at all. He didn't show up for a week. Then he came trooping up the railway track from the village, riding my best mule with *my* forty-five strapped to his hip, with *my* stockman and yard-boy marching proudly behind him, and with a collection of the village riff-raff; soldiers, beggars, peons, even a couple of female camp followers in sleazy pink

dresses and garish tortoise-shell combs thrust rakishly through their straight black Indian locks.

"H'ya, Boss?" he greeted me. "Howza fire comin' along?"

"Fine," I said wearily, "it's past us now. It's down there, burning out the lower valley at present."

"Geez," he said in a voice of genuine sympathy, "that's too bad. Wait a sec till I dismiss my troops." He turned in his saddle and held up his flail-like arm.

"*Krakatoa casaba venuto*," he intoned solemnly. "*Michi wichi home now. Toodoodle boodle costello. Beat it!*" And waving them majestically away, he tossed his reins to the stockman and deigned to honour my humble house with his presence.

During the General's brief but brilliant career in the banana industry, he demonstrated a most extraordinary ability of swaying native audiences, especially military ones, by nothing more than his sheer physical bulk and the euphonious employment of a lot of gibberish. At one time, down at port—and this was weeks after I had canned him—he was escorted over to the company club house by the city's military band and a guard of honour—a courtesy that had never been extended to a white man, not even our division manager of the American Consul. Why? Nobody knows. That was General Gates for you.

My own introduction into the banana industry was none too sedate. True, it lacked the colour of the General's, but it was far more dangerous. It started the evening that I arrived at the end of steel—and by the end of the line I mean that the bastard gauge railway that I took out of Tela that morning was completely devoted to serving a vast area of cultivated banana land, and that any passenger or freight business that it might do at the same time was purely coincidental. It started in a port, to be sure, but it didn't terminate in an interior city; it wasn't within miles of any civilization; it just petered out at the rim of the jungle. There was nothing but a ramshackled Superintendency and a few labour camps—beyond which lay the new land farms served only by tram-

ines. It was to one of these remote plantations that I had been assigned.

It so happened that it was pay-day and all the staff members were assembled at the Superintendency, having ridden in through the jungle for three good reasons: first, it was customary; second, it was necessary because the native labour made for the nearest *cantinas* as soon as money was circulated, with the result that there was always plenty of nachete- and gun-fighting until the fumes of *aguardiente* wore off; and third, the whites were not above looking the grape in the eye themselves.

It was considered suicide to attempt to stay on one of these jungle farms pay-day night, but I had taken such a mazzing that afternoon and evening (what with my pith-helmet, flannel trousers, white buckskin shoes and—of all things a tennis-racquet) that I curtly declined their invitations to ride into the village to enjoy the limited offerings of the local flesh-pots. Once the gang had gone whooping down the rack aboard their mules and horses, leaving me alone with the Chinese cook, himself happily inebriated, as well as a few morose native house-boys who padded about with rolled newspapers whacking disconsolately at roaches and mosquitoes, I went out into the evening and discovered a railway engineer who was about to take his dinky little engine and string of tram-cars up to the end of the tram-line with a load of banana roots, and asked him for a lift to my farm-house.

He looked down at me from the cab, a smile wrinkling his leathery face.

"Didn't somebody tell you to-day's pay-day?"

"Sure. What of it?"

He told me then that for twenty-nine out of every thirty days only the office staff and some of the construction men and transients, like himself, slept at the Superintendency, so that normally there were plenty of beds to go around. But on pay-day, once a month, the farm men kicked over the traces, came to town, tracked mud and manure all over the lot and occupied all the beds and all the space the Superintendency could offer.



As I rocked along over the light-weight rails, poking my head out the engineer's window, I saw nothing but endless rows of banana plants, their graceful green fronds splashed with moonlight. Then we passed an overseer's trim house.

"I can't see why the men who live there wouldn't rather stay than hang around the Superintendency," I remarked.

"You will in a minute," the engineer shouted as he yanked open the throttle. "Labour camps on the left. Look at your own risk!" Whereupon he ducked low and his engine roared past a long line of bunk-houses, illuminated by a dozen camp-fires burning on the hard-packed dirt common between camp houses and the track. The entire clearing was alive with men and women. Some were dancing, others scuffling, fencing with machetes, or gathered about gambling-tables and portable bars.

A gaunt Indian with the flames throwing high-lights across his prominent cheek-bones suddenly ran forward, yip-yipping and brandishing his blade. He swept the glittering steel above his head in a reckless gesture of fury, and then rushed to the middle of the track, where he struck the rails in frenzied blows that rang out above the oncoming rumble of the train.

"Look out, you crazy fool!"

As the engineer screamed this warning he flung himself on whistle cord and brake control. But it was impossible to stop. Only at the last second did the Indian's defiance melt; he leaped aside as the bumper caught him a sickening blow above the ankle and sent him spinning.

There was a roar from the crowd. Weapons were brandished. Several shots rained off the fuel tender.

"Did we kill him?" I asked.

"Now you see why the boys go to town on pay-day," the engineer said, ignoring the question. "Once those people get likkered up they want to fight. And white meat's their specialty."

We passed several overseers' houses, all in darkness, and several labour camps. The farther we progressed inland, the wilder the scenes became.

"This is the last farm on the line I touch to-night," the engineer said. "You'll have to hike from here. It's only a couple of kilometres. But when you come to the labour camp, get out of sight. Good luck."

There were no banana plants flanking the railway now. As I stumbled along I could see giant, fallen trees whose stark stumps and branches were silhouetted against the night sky. The pungent odour of burning brush cut across my nostrils. Ahead loomed the virgin jungle—dark, foreboding, mysterious. Baboons barked their disapproval from laced lianas above.

Cold sweat beaded my forehead as I stood shivering just before the clearing that marked the labour camp. I could hear voices raised hoarsely in song and exhortation. Two figures suddenly leaped on to the track a scant fifty yards from me. Up and down they struggled, swinging their machetes, screaming and scuffling. Killing was in the air. I couldn't possibly walk past that camp and come out alive.

A whiff of stagnant water led me to investigate a six-foot drainage ditch on the opposite side of the track from the clearing. Ignominiously I slid down into the scum and crouched low, moving cautiously forward through the tangle of weeds and debris. I emerged at the far end of the clearing, soaked.

I could see the hut now—mud walls and thatched roof. Heart pounding crazily, I slipped across the hard-packed dirt clearing to the dark entrance.

"*Quien vive?*" It was a low, guttural, and unfriendly voice.

"*Amigo,*" I explained hurriedly.

A bronzed Indian, bare from the waist up, came through the doorway, machete in hand. I floundered about with my meagre Spanish vocabulary, gradually managing to identify myself. He grunted a reluctant approval and escorted me into the dim interior, indicating a cot. Who he was or what he was doing there I was too weary to attempt to find out. I flopped down, and slept.

## Help Wanted—Female

OUR nipa shack set on the edge of the sullen coffee-coloured river, surrounded by the jungle, consisted of but one big room with smoky rafters overhead and dirt floor underfoot. We each had a big cot in a corner, with a mosquito net strung above it on a frame. In the middle of the room was the long combination reading-writing- and dining-room table. There were a few camp chairs and native mahogany chairs scattered around. Out back was the open-air clay oven where the cook prepared our food, flanked on the one side by the corral where we kept our riding stock and on the other by the stockman's hut, where he and his woman lived. This was the man I had bumped into that night when I first stumbled into the house. You may ask right away—what about the cook, where did she live. That all depended on what she looked like and who the overseer was. In other words, cooks were picked for pulchritude rather than culinary ability. Hell ! even the best of them couldn't cook anyway.

We didn't insert want ads. in the local Press for our cooks. There was no local Press. Besides, nobody could read. When the overseer felt the need of new blood he would simply make his wants known and it would become our joint duty to keep an eye peeled along the jungle trails for any parties of natives moving southward from the high country or northward from the port—preferably the former, as these people were healthier and cleaner. Eventually some sixteen-year-old innocent with lustrous black eyes, *café au lait* complexion, high Indian cheek-bones and long, shiny, black braids down the back would come padding along in her bare feet, cheerfully carrying her share of the family goods, wearing

her bleached white cotton dress that had been washed and pounded against many a rock in many a mountain stream—and if she were particularly fastidious or fortunate, perhaps she would have a slip made from a discarded flour bag with the stencil still in evidence. Representations would then be made to her parents, with the result that young Maria would find herself on the pay-roll at a stupendous salary of twenty dollars a month (gold) and jealousy would run high within the confines of that shack until domestic life settled down and the novelty had worn off. The overseer I worked for invariably insisted that his new cooks submerge themselves in a creolin bath prior to taking up their duties. This really worked very well for him and I don't recall that he had to journey to the dispensary once during the six months I worked there.

In Maria's case, and in practically all cases where a young, simple aborigine would be haled from out of the jungle to set up housekeeping in a white man's house, her first reactions would be as refreshing and touching as those of an orphan girl when she first sees her own room with its chintz and gay wallpaper and white bed, in the home in which she is thenceforth to live. Maria would peer into the hut, her big, tender eyes wide with excitement. A real phonograph! Bureaus! A desk! A sideboard with screens to keep out the bugs! *Madre de Dios!*

Then in she would go on tip-toe, with a little catch of her breath. Like a puppy dog she would run from object to object, admiring, touching, opening drawers, flipping the pages of a movie magazine, sniffing in jars and bottles. Finally she would sit on the big double cot and pat the blankets and unfold the netting. The crockery wash bowl and pitcher in the corner, with its horrible gilt-and-pink decor, would be just too much. Likely as not she would weep with joy, and then blink up at the man who owned and lived in such significance, proceeding to fall hopelessly, completely and piteously in love with him. After that it was a cinch.

Maria developed a really terrific crush on the overseer. It was actually embarrassing the way she would stand in the threshold of the back door for hours at a time, twisting her

apron strings and gouging her big toe self-consciously into the dirt every time her master would glance her way. It got to the point where she neglected her duties as cook, simply overcome with calf love. It got to the point where she couldn't even serve him without getting all in a lather. And as for the rest of us, why, we just didn't exist, let alone eat !

Each overseer's house had a wall 'phone connected with the Superintendency. These 'phones worked on a single party line, each farm having its own number of rings. Ours was nailed to a cross beam by the door leading out back to the kitchen.

The first time I met the District Superintendent was one evening when I was working on the reports and the other members of the staff were still out riding the farm. The Superintendent was in an irritable frame of mind, having pushed through the mosquito-infested swamps for several hours.

"I wish you'd see about getting me a fresh riding animal," he said crisply, "mine's all pooped. You'll find him out by the corral. Tell your stockman to change the saddle and he can ride him down to my office in the morning and bring yours back."

I jumped up to do his bidding and as I ran out the back door I noticed Maria peering belligerently around the corner. Before I was out of earshot I heard the telephone ring, started to go back and then realized that it was the Superintendent calling his own office. There was a terrific tintinnabulation of kitchenware, glassware, crockery, and in short, anything Maria could lay her hands upon.

"What the hell !" I heard the Superintendent exclaim, more in surprise than in anger.

There followed a torrent of abuse in shrill Spanish, and after that a protracted wailing. Horrified, I rushed back into the hut and found Maria standing directly by the telephone, screaming in the poor man's face at the top of her lusty young lungs.

"Ge-zus ! Where did you men pick out this wild cat ?

And what's the idea of her firing pots at me and then standing there bellowing like a stuck pig?"

It developed that the girl was simply protecting her master's interests—at least, she thought she was. After all, this stranger meant nothing to her and she wasn't going to permit anybody to come in and use that mysterious instrument while her liege was at large. Of course, the overseer remonstrated with her rather severely when he returned, only to succeed in causing her to burst into tears. He had hurt her feelings. Women, it seems, are like that—not only on Park Avenue but also on banana farms!

## *A Day on the Farm*

**A** MAN does not have to live in Central America very long before he discovers that it is a hothouse country in every meaning of the word. In a scant twelve months, Nature transforms a ponderous four-pound banana root planted three feet below the surface, into a cluster of twenty-foot trees, each bearing a bunch of bananas containing close to twelve dozen fruits. She blows the seeds of her ferns and orchids into the eaves and belfries of great, crumbling cathedrals and ancient temples, there to take root and flourish. She will even engage to grow a sprig of bougainvillea on the brim of your hat if it is sufficiently mouldy after your trek through her steaming lowlands. And it will be ! As with her plants and flowers, so with her people and animals, Nature attends to an early and a lavish blossoming, and an early and quite complete decay.

About the only plant that escapes this onus seems to be the banana. For some reason—by some mere whim—it has been discovered that a bunch of bananas cut green, when the fingers are full and well-rounded, ripens better artificially—i.e., hung in the basement or under a native house on stilts—than it does if allowed to mature while still on the tree. Were it not for this phenomenon, there would be no banana industry because it would be impossible to ship and handle ripe, soft bananas without reducing them to soup before they got to market. You may ask : what does happen to a bunch of bananas left to ripen on the tree ? The answer is that the fruits get round and yellow and speckled, then the sun bursts open the skin and they are promptly infested with bugs, maggots, and fruit flies. Even those yellow fingers that may escape this horrible fate are still insipid to the taste, lacking

that creamy, rich texture, flavourful and delicious, that only the artificially ripened bananas contain.

What's in this banana farming anyway? What are its ardours, dangers, and rewards?

Let's start at the beginning.

Farm routine is simple—and monotonous. Up at five-thirty, dressed by dawn, always the same breakfast of peeled oranges impaled on forks, and eaten with a massage-like movement that liberally distributes citric acid from ear to ear, fried eggs, red beans beaten to a paste and fried with onions, coffee essence (pure syrup of the coffee bean) poured in the bottom of the cup to be filled with thin, hot milk, native bread and native butter (more of a cheese than a butter). Always that sharp early morning odour of acrid coffee beans being parched in the kitchen.

The mules are saddled and ready at six. Then four or five hours of steady riding, where riding is possible, through the farm areas already cleared of jungle and underbrush inspecting the young plants set twenty-one feet apart and already pushing their shining green leaves through the rich loam. Eventually to the far end of the farm where the ringing blows of the axe resound against the ironwood, *matapalo* (a queer vine-like tree which entirely entwines itself about the trunk and limbs of some giant of the forest, eventually choking the life out of it and leaving a deceptive shell instead of a real tree), Ceiba and mahogany. This business of clearing the forest is the most interesting phase of new-land banana farming. Most of the trees—notably the Ceiba—splay at the base of the trunk to enormous proportions. This is because the root system does not extend very deeply into the earth and Nature has provided this substitute to hold the giant erect. The native contractors whose business it is to drop these trees invariably construct a skeleton scaffold about ten feet above the ground, on which their choppers balance precariously, in order to avoid cutting through any more wood than necessary. The stump will later be dynamited. In a jungle clearing it was not uncommon to have five or six chopping crews working simultaneously on big trees. And the only warning signal

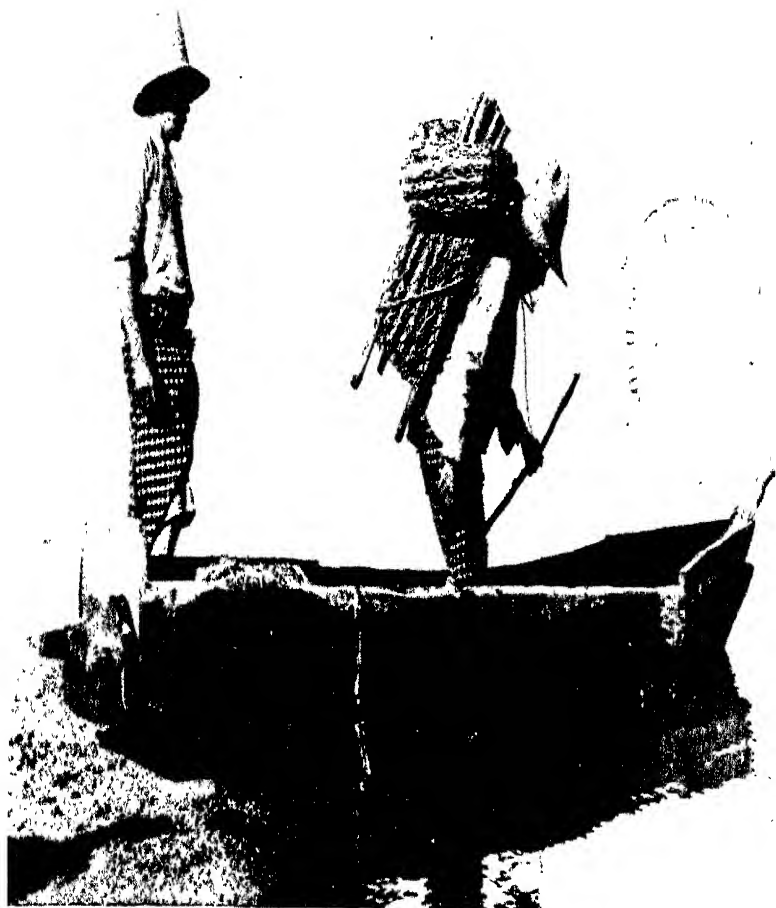


they give comes when that first tell-tale rending of fibre indicates that their victim is about to topple. Then they fling their axes to the ground, jumping wildly after them, yip-yipping like a tribe of Comanche Indians. Quickly then the eye detects the mass of foliage far above tipping slightly against the sky, swaying uncertainly, tugging at restraining lianas, working through branches from other trees, gathering speed, moving swifter second by second until with a growing roar the magnificent tree comes thundering to the ground, throwing up a veritable whirlwind of dust and leaves and broken branches—and men or mules if such are unfortunate enough to be in the way.

For some reason monkeys are attracted to trees being chopped down. Perhaps they feel that the poor earth-bound creatures below are trying to get them and they know that all they have to do is sit in the topmost branches, thumbing their excuses for noses, hurling corozal nuts, and chattering their defiance. Too late, they discover that they are riding downward at a pace swifter than any they have ever known before. Then commences a mad race down the bole of the tree, trying to get as near to earth as possible before the crash. Seldom is a monkey killed, but quite often they are stunned, and the labourers pounce upon them and capture them before they can gather their wits and get aloft again.

Back at eleven for a bottle of warm beer and a hot lunch. Then siesta for an hour—said siesta consisting merely of flinging one's sodden and clothed body on the cot and falling into a dreamless, sweaty sleep, only to be aroused with a sickly sweet taste in the mouth and a general dopey feeling. An afternoon in the saddle soon dissipates this. There are root stocks to examine, drainage ditches to cubicate, lining stakes to inspect, railway right-of-way, bridge work, tram-lines—a multifarious detail of farm operation to be tabulated for the pay-roll.

Home again at five for a dip in the creek, provided there's any water, otherwise a precarious swim in the alligator-infested river. A change of clothes, a half an hour lolling about the porch, reading or drinking—then a dinner of okra soup, more



Aldous Huxley once said of Lake Atitlan, far up in the high-lands of Guatemala, that it was truly the Lake Como of the Western world. Aldous was right !

Blessed are the meek—Guatemala is in a particularly advantageous



because her highlands are liberally dotted with noble cathedrals.

(c) Ewing Galloway, N. Y.





No guarantee that your laundry will be returned within twenty-four hours—but here in Guatemala's volcanic highlands you can rest assured of one thing—when it does come back it will be spotless because that's the way these sturdy Indians are.

red beans, fried plantains, steamed rice, alligator pears, sliced pineapple. Needless to say, all hands are in bed and asleep by eight o'clock.

Here's a tabular view of 'One Day in the Life of a Banana Overseer,' which I wrote for *Fortune* (March 1933):

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| 5 a.m.  | Rises and turns out timekeeper, sees that cook, yardman, and stockman are on the job. Takes rainfall and temperature readings. Breakfasts on native oranges (peeled and impaled whole on a fork), eggs, fried red beans mashed to a paste, and native coffee (parched in his own kitchen).  |
| 6 a.m.  | His two foremen appear at the office in the basement to report that fruit-cutting preliminaries are well under way; all the mules are at the camp, properly equipped with pack-saddles and pads, all fruit-cutting gangs have been told exactly how many bunches to harvest, and all of them have seen a model bunch illustrating the proper degree of fullness required for the New York market. Each foreman reports that fruit cars have already been spotted at the various spurs as requested the previous evening. Overseer goes over work sheets preparatory to riding the farm. |
| 7 a.m.  | Rides the farm, checking different cutters as to grade and quantity, also sees that mules are not overloaded and that freshly cut bunches are properly loaded into cars.  |
| 11 a.m. | At the same time he keeps an eye on the status of work under way on which labour will be done during days when there is no fruit cutting: ditch digging, pruning, replanting, bridge and road construction, regrassing pastures and repairing fences, keeping camp grounds in trim. Makes notes to see that certain animals are rebranded, certain fines imposed for  |

- sloppy or deceitful work. Stops at camp commissary for two bottles of native beer.
- 11 a.m. Returns to house, issues commissary coupons
- 12 noon to contractors against their balances on the pay-roll, issues hospital passes, administers quinine, issues barbed wire, rope, and nails for various jobs, settles domestic disputes between labourers and families in his camp. Lunches on okra soup, beef stew, red beans, rice, bread-fruit, alligator pears, and fresh pineapple (latter two commodities out of his own yard).
- 12.30 to 2 p.m. Removes shoes and leggings, unbuttons shirt, and sleeps heavily.
- 2 p.m. Rides farm, with particular attention to status of cutting and to estimate output for succeeding cuttings. Has one bottle of beer.
- 4 p.m.
- 5 p.m. Stands by at office for detailed report from foremen as to precise number of bunches cut by each gang, number loaded into each car, together with car number and spur location. Discusses outlook for future cuttings and then reports by telephone to chief clerk of his district, giving him all facts and estimates.
- 5 p.m. Takes shower (if any water in reserve tank)
- 6 p.m. and has generous shot of whisky. Reads *Adventure* magazine on porch in undershirt. Has dinner (same as lunch).
- 6 p.m. Sits on porch smoking native 'King Bee' cigarettes (five cents per pack), complaining about heat, and gossiping about Company.
- 8 p.m. Turns in and reads himself to sleep.

So it was in the early days of banana pioneering. To-day the traveller may traverse a banana division in a Ford sedan mounted on railway wheels and see little evidence of this pioneering work. On either side of the track, stretching away for miles, are glistening sea-green banana plants. They are

fully grown, in many cases the land has been completely cleared of all vestiges of that jungle that once graced it. Gone are those giants of mahogany. Gone is the underbrush that was once so thick that a man couldn't take a step forward without hacking his way through, gone are the wild cats, the baboons, and the snakes. It is big business to-day—business and regimentation built on that most substantial of all pioneering platforms: blood and sweat supplied by man; sun, rain, and loam supplied by Nature.

Trim white steamers are constantly plying these Caribbean waters, bound for various banana ports to load and carry to northern markets cargoes of 25,000 to 100,000 bunches of fine, green bananas. These bananas are cut, harvested, loaded into railway cars and delivered to the dock within twenty-four hours of the time the ship is scheduled to arrive for her loading. To-day it is simply a matter of radio, telephone, fruit cutters, mule men, and supervision.

Tell the driver to stop his car and go into the switch at that siding ahead. Get out and stand beside one of those two yellow railway cars and watch what happens. This is just one of thousands of banana 'platforms.' They are called platforms because of that open space with the padded fence that you see beside the track. Here in the early hours of the fruit cutting, before the cars have been 'spotted' by a busy switch engine, mule men appear from the dim, dew-drenched recesses of the farm, leading their grunting pack animals laden down with four or six bunches on specially constructed saddles. Each bunch is carefully removed from the saddle and stood against the padded fence to await the arrival of the cars and the loaders. If you don't mind getting your buckskin shoes dirty or soaking your trouser legs, follow him back half a mile or so to the point where his fruit cutter is on the job. Along the way you will see freshly cut green bunches still dripping with sap, stacked against banana trees beside the mule road. As the mule man loads these on his animals, come on down to the end of the section where you can see those two labourers at work. The one with the pole that looks like an apple knocker or a glorified broom handle (perhaps



fifteen feet long) is thrusting it up into the midst of the leaves of a tree some thirty feet high. You will notice that there is a sharp blade something like a trowel on the end of that pole. This blade he jams into the trunk of the tree far above his head, nicking it until the weight of the seventy-pound bunch of bananas causes it to buckle, and the bunch swings gently downward. As it comes within reach, the cutter drops his pole and seizes his machete while his companion 'shoulders the bunch'—that is, swings it on his shoulder. His companion then severs it with one whistling stroke of the machete and trims off the blossom end. Then while the 'backer' carries the bunch over to the mule men or stacks it against a convenient tree the other one calmly hacks down the trunk from which the bunch had just been harvested. In other words, a banana tree produces but one bunch, after which it is cut down so that it will no longer absorb nourishment that should go into other trees in the same cluster or 'mat' which have yet to 'shoot' their bunch of fruit. One sure horizontal stroke of the machete will sever a banana tree, since it is entirely constructed of tightly packed tissue and contains no wood fibre whatsoever. A banana tree is actually 90 per cent water.

All this sounds simple. It is simple, provided the cutter knows his business, but were he to go about promiscuously hacking down trees whose fruit had not arrived at that stage of maturity required for the market, he would be wasting his Company's money and his own time, because the gimlet-eyed inspectors at the dock would immediately reject the bunches he had cut. And, of course, it would be simple to determine who had cut them, because each contractor is responsible for the contents of certain cars, which are all numbered and labelled as to the number of bunches within.

The majority of the patient Indian peons who squat in the shadow of their respective banana cars, responsible for the count—that is, the number of bunches loaded into their own particular little leaf-padded kingdoms, do not know how to count. And yet they seldom make a mistake. Here's the way they do it: each bunch of bananas carries on it twenty or thirty tiny infertile and undeveloped banana fingers that are

about half the size of a pod of green peas. These miniature clusters are easily stripped off and separated. Then as the mule men bring the harvest to the 'platform' and the loaders begin to pack the bunches away in neat vertical rows within the cool confines of the car, young Constantino Mendoza cagily removes his battered straw hat and tosses in a tiny banana pod as each full size dripping bunch passes his watchful eye. When the car is loaded, he scrambles out. Hat and contents are then handed over without a word to the American overseer or timekeeper, who dumps the pods out and counts each one, thus arriving at the correct tally. Another practice employed by those labourers able to write (Spanish, of course) is to use a broken banana to mark a tally against one of the slats of the car. The sap which exudes from this broken banana looks like water at first, but within a few minutes turns white as chalk and all that is necessary after the car is loaded is to count the number of vertical strokes. Certain labourers and contractors aspiring to the higher arts have found this banana chalk method a dramatic and effective means of scrawling on the sides of cars and locomotives winged words for posterity as regards their feelings towards their overseers, North Americans in general, the banana company they happen to be working for, or perhaps even nothing more original than the same sort of comments that we find decorating the lavatories in our own railway stations. There is a great thrill in riding up to some string of cars at a banana 'platform' and finding your own ancestry discussed (frequently with illustrations) in terms that send a glow through your sallow cheeks!

## *Blowdown*

**Y**ES, bananas are better when harvested green and ripened artificially at the market centres—and also the vagaries of Nature are such that a banana company must have holdings widely spread in many different tropical lands to maintain a year-round supply for demanding markets thousands of miles to the north. Mother Nature's unpredictable behaviour makes this essential and is expressed in one or more of these three ways: wind storms, floods, and fires. It is nothing for a storm to come howling down between the mountain ranges, crumpling over millions of splendid producing banana trees. In fifteen minutes such a storm can raze a stand of fruit extending as far as the eye can see, leaving behind nothing but scudding clouds, gradually returning sunshine and a desolation of broken banana bunches that can never be harvested.

The first time I had an opportunity of riding my mule beyond the cultivated banana land and into virgin jungle (other than that on which we were actively working) was one that made its impression upon my sensitivities primarily in terms of ticks, nettles, stinging insects, and, of course, the screaming monkeys which persisted in riding along the aerial jungle way—the Kipling Banderlog—hurling down their insults and their missiles. Neither my mule nor I enjoyed their language, but we could at least put up with it. It was only when they kicked down the corozas and coco-nuts at us that we were seriously disturbed. Finally I dismounted and tethered my mule to a tree, to proceed onward with my machete, hacking my way upward in an effort to gain the crest of the mountain range. My khaki clothes were soaked with sweat, my skin lacerated with sharply cutting grasses and

needle-keen thorns by the time I surmounted the top. Also I had polled a very creditable vote of confidence from at least a million tiny red ticks. Still the view of that magnificent banana valley was obstructed. The trees shouldered up in a vertical curtain of green which scarcely permitted sunlight to come through, let alone offering any clear vision of what lay below and beyond. So, down into the next valley, and then, ever more laboriously, up and up the next mountain range until at length there appeared a smoked clearing of land that some squatter planned to sow to corn, and from this point the undulating sea of green banana plants, orderly as a giant Japanese garden, spread out with its toy system of railway tracks, spurs, and branches carefully laid out through that vast valley of farms.

Beyond the fine line of the horizon, over the curve of the globe, the shoulder of the earth, were other valleys, equally vast, and beyond these, others, and beyond these, still others, the immensities multiplying, lengthening out, vaster and vaster. The whole gigantic sweep of the tropic uplands expanded, titanic, before the eye of the mind, flagellated with heat, quivering, and shimmering under the sun's glowing copper eye. All about between the horizons, the rusty green carpet of the land unrolled itself to infinity. It was parched with heat, cracked and warped by a merciless sun, powdered with a fine silver dust. At long intervals, a faint breath of wind out of the south passed slowly over the levels of the baked, rustling farm, accentuating the silence, marking off the stillness, stressing the ponderous heat. It seemed to exhale from the land itself, a prolonged sigh redolent of the tropic spirit of siesta. It was the time of siesta, and the great earth, the mother, slept the sleep of exhaustion, the infinite repose of the colossus, benignant, eternal, strong, the nourisher of nations, the feeder of an entire world.

A sudden uplift, a sense of exhilaration, of physical exaltation appeared abruptly to sweep me from my feet. As from a point high above the world, I seemed to dominate a sleeping universe, a whole order of things. Even the buzzards seemed inert, suspended, as though they were

hung in the sky. Smoke plumes swayed aimlessly over tiny houses. It was dizzying, stunning, stupefying. The mind went spinning away, reeling, drunk with the intoxication of mere immensity, drugged with the impalpable blanket of heat. Stupendous ideas for which there were no names drove headlong through my brain. Terrible, formless shapes, vague figures, gigantic, monstrous, distorted, whirled at a mad gallop through my imagination.

It was dusk by the time I had struggled downward to my mule and I then learned something that I shall always remember—never tie an animal to a tree in the jungle. The poor creature was fairly alive with stinging ants that had been interrupted in their endless climb up the tree I had the misfortune to tie the reins around, with the result that they had simply transferred their attention from the tree to the mule. Ants in his ears, eyes, and nose. There was nothing to do but slap off as many as possible and then lead the poor half-blinded creature to the nearest brook, unsaddle him and let him wallow and scour his body in the sand.

It was only the day following this trek up through that wild, untamed jungle that I awoke before dawn, startled into sensibility by the booted step of the stockman, the low conversation keyed to an excitement readily sensed—and then with a sudden acceleration of heart-beats to hear the wild, persistent ringing of the telephone.

But outside I couldn't seem to hear anything. Listening intently I could hear my own heart beating. Its tempo disturbed me. There was a film of perspiration standing out on my forehead and along my arms. Nervousness . . . but what about?

The overseer had his ear glued to the wall 'phone listening in to the reports from the various farms to the head office. I watched him standing there in the first dim light of day, his big body encased in nothing but a suit of B.V.D.'s, his flat, bare feet stamping and scratching at the calves of his legs as he alternated from one foot to the other in an effort to keep the mosquitoes away. Finally his turn came. He cut in on the conversation and was told to get his organization

together at once and go out and cut every available stem of fruit possible, carrying the harvest immediately to the various 'platforms.'

"Le's get goin'. District below ours is already flat. Wind's coming up fast. Every minute counts. Step on it."

Of course I didn't know what to do. This was all new to me. That a storm was expected was obvious, it was in the air, but this rush to get to work, the five o'clock 'phone call, the talk about other districts being flat . . . what did that all add up to?

Out in the corral I studied the sky, which was faintly lavender and tightly drawn as though the heavenly canopy were made of some fabric like aeroplane-cloth. Stars of thin silver were pricked through this screen. There was a religious, ethereal quality to the dawn and to the mountains that shouldered up against the early morning sky. Faint opaline streaks were visible as we mounted our mules and rode furiously up the track to the labour camp. There didn't seem to be any air somehow—just space. It was hard to breathe. There was no body to the atmosphere. And I was puzzled by the unusual luminosity of that dawn. It was so different from the usual early mornings with the mist and the fog and the sounds of life.

Miraculously the banana cutters, the mules and backers, were all assembled as we thundered into the compound before the labour camp. It was only a matter of minutes before the overseer had dispatched them to the farm with instructions as to what to do and how to do it.

Now the dawn was breaking. Instead of coming out clearly as one would expect the positive print of a clean negative to do, it turned a peculiar greenish blue shade. The Jamaican negro foreman riding by my side had a face which was usually black—utterly black—wholesomely offset by a big mouthful of horse teeth. But in this odd light all the imperfections, pock-marks, scars, open pores, were accentuated and his skin had that unwholesome purplish cast that one notices when he stands before one of those cheap photographer's windows with the garish lavender-coloured

mercury light which somehow draws all the life and colour out of a person's face and eyes.

The day seemed to grow lighter moment by moment—but not with sunlight. Rather it was as though some celestial scheme of indirect lighting were playing up into the sky from behind the mountains . . . as though the sun were flinging its effulgence upward from below the rim of the world.

When the last cutter had disappeared into the fastness of the farm the overseer turned his mule back to the house. The stillness of the day, the suspense of all life around us sent a little premonitory chill down my spine.

"What's the idea?" I asked him as we dismounted and turned the animals over to the stockman.

There was no answer. The overseer merely stomped into the house, passing the office, passing the cook, passing the 'phone, passing his bed—all he did was slump down on a chair—and wait.

It didn't make sense to me. This man was a worker. I had never before seen him return to the house at any hour like this—nor had I ever seen him idle during the working hours of the day.

"Nothing to do," he said wearily at last in answer to the unspoken question in my eyes. "Not light enough to do any report work in the office and not safe to be caught out in the farm away from the telephone."

I sat on the edge of my chair. The feeling of suspense was growing. Outside it was clear now and quite light, in a thin sort of way. The atmosphere was oppressive. Visibility was nothing short of remarkable. Early as it was, I could see valleys and vegetation on the distant mountains that had never been more than patches of purple and green before—even in the brilliant, pulsating glare of midday. And the thin air seemed to carry sound more distinctly, too. The shouts and exhortations of fruit cutters, the mules crashing through bush, the heavy leafage of banana trees sweeping and rustling as the trunks were severed, all these could be clearly heard. From the railway yard, just beyond

the town came the pant of locomotives, the coupling of fruit cars, sounds I had never before heard from the house.

The 'phone jangled and the overseer answered it with an alacrity that belied his attitude of nonchalance. He said something about spotting cars and clearing tracks. Then he came back and sat down.

"She'll be here in ten minutes—or less. Your first blowdown, isn't it?"

I started to ask him further questions, but he cut me short with a quick, nervous gesture of his hand.

"Listen!"

We sat on the edge of our chairs, taut, listening, sniffing. The sky was mottled, green, and grey. Far above the mountains was a whispering as of a mighty rush of cold wind. The elements seemed to be sucked right out of the air, drawn up as though to join forces in some enormous concentration of power.

"Listen, for Christ's sake, will you!" The overseer snapped it out as though I had spoken up before some exquisite rendition of symphonic music.

There was a whistling sound that turned to a roar, a shrieking, howling, rushing whirl of wind and dust and particles. It streaked past the shack, rustling the thatch, skimming over submissive banana fronds, bringing in its wake a sudden chill. The vacuum was inundated with cold air. Then, without more warning, a vast, downward beat of wind swirled past at hurricane force. Countless eddies of dust and trash were picked up and spun crazily about and then flung with ferocious contempt into the storm. Resignedly the interminable line of plants stood against this implacable foe, battling its advance as best they could with their floppy wall of leaves.

"Listen," whispered the overseer, rising and facing the wind.

Higher and higher grew the scream of Nature on the rampage, more and more powerfully beat in the storm. The house trembled, doors slammed with terrific reverberations, labourers ran wildly up the track, their shirts whipped



up around their heads. It was agonizing to stand there, hands clenched, tortured by the knowledge that the top note had not yet been reached. The basal melodic tone, the mighty diapason of the elements had mounted and swelled before us, spread throughout the valley. The whole enormous region between the parallel mountain ranges vibrated with its primitive symphony. Wind whistled through leaves and lianas and big drops of cold rain hurled through the air on a long driving slant, making the amphitheatre ring and hiss with their impact against the sea of leaves.

Still the storm rose and expanded. The pressure, even on the ear-drums, was terrific. It flayed the earth and sent its pæan soaring.

The overseer gripped my arm in steel and pointed to the lower end of the farm. I could see streaky clouds scudding along the horizon, a rift in the mottled sky, thin spots and streaks of blue. The storm was marching up on us at a terrific speed.

"Here it comes!" screamed the overseer.

And even as he bellowed the words the dread crescendo was achieved. High, clear, and thrilling, on its sustained pitch came the force that brooked no resistance. I watched, fascinated, horrified as the trembling plants buckled before this blast. It was as though some gigantic sickle swept through them. Millions of living plants snapped and succumbed, fruit and fronds settling to the earth in one vast, rustling confusion.

Transfixed, I followed the fury of the storm, followed with my eyes the section after section of proudly standing banana trees being flayed and buckled before that last merciless force of wind. It was almost as though some invisible celestial scythe were sweeping across the farm, each swathe laying low a vast number of trees—that invisible blade missing not a single tree in its path.

And all of a sudden the sky was blue overhead. The shriek subsided into a wail, the wail became a moan, the moan a whisper and the whisper was finally lost in the harsh, insistent jangle of the telephone.

these midnight rides armed to the teeth, and with plenty of bottled reserve in the saddle-bags. Occasionally Bill would go to see Theresa.

But Bill learned moderation. He got his release from drink—but that's about all. Yes, that angular party you see standing there on the pier, inspecting bananas, is Bill Moreland, Williams '21. Yes, that's a three-day stubble on his chin. Yes, he has worn that pair of khaki trousers and that stained white shirt a day or so longer than indicated by the laws of sanitation. Yes, he has girl friends who are brown and habits he isn't writing home about. But there are plenty of us, hanging wistfully over the rail as our ship churns her green-and-white mosaic in the bay, wishing we had the courage to lead Bill Moreland's kind of life; wishing we could slough off our responsibilities and share some of his adventures and enjoy the independent, if lonely, life that is his. If the tropics has really 'got him' . . . boy, bring a double whisky-and-soda—and here! tear up this steamer ticket!

## *Fire ! Fire !*

A WIND storm or a tropical torrential downpour—there is no combatting either of them.

“If God wants to push us around,” my overseer used to grumble, “that’s His business.” He would shrug his great, damp shoulders and hoist himself another swig from the whisky bottle. Then he would glower out at a sodden, swollen yard, or across an endless, dreary expanse of submissive banana leaves as the continuous downpour of rain drummed across them. I soon learned that a flood condition involving unheard-of quantities of water dumped into the valley by the natural watershed of mountains on either side and augmented by the ever-swelling river could raise pluperfect hell on a farm, and that there was nothing that could be done about it except to stand by with the dug-outs and rescue screaming native women and children who had become isolated, or to help the dumb live stock to the higher ground where they could at least stand on their own feet. On more than one occasion we would paddle through the rows of banana trees and up the railway right-of-way, directly over the deeply submerged tracks. Then would come the gradual diminishing of the water-line and eventually the blazing hot sun and the rankest, most widespread deposit of evil-smelling alluvium that ever assailed the human nostrils. It was black slime and it was everywhere !

Now, a fire was different. It was not regarded as an act of God, being man’s carelessness. The dreadful conflagrations that would roar across our horizon, shrivelling thousands of green banana trees to dust in no time, were not always occasioned by the careless flick of a lighted cigarette from a passing native’s hand. Oh, no. Too often they would

appear at the very tag end of the dry season when the whole country-side was gasping and when it seemed ages since the last sweet rain had gently thrashed across the thirsty jungle. Then when the green of the farm had turned to rust, leaves were sere and the parchment-like trash of old banana plants lay thickly, tinder-crisp underfoot—that's when fire would be discovered. And in the most inaccessible, remotest possible sections of the farm !

The answer was simple, of course. No white man could do administrative work, hire men, meet pay-rolls, sign contracts, fool with native women, fire labourers, get drunk, make unstudied comments about the political situation, without incurring the enmity of some of the natives. A patient people they were, too, when it came to the gentle art of retaliation. Months might go by before one would strike—but when he did, look out for the sudden, swift swing of a steel machete in the moonlight, look out for the firmly wedged rock in the frog of the railway track as your motor car put-puts its way through the darkness—and look out particularly for arson.

The first time our farm was set on fire was at the very height of the dog days. Drought. A brassy, cloudless sky caught the intense sun heat reflected upward from the arid surface of the earth and drove it down again upon the wilted plants. The merciless blaze of a copper sun sent heat-waves pulsating over the withered jungles, throbbing along the railway track in mighty undulations. Creeks, freshets and river-beds which veined the farm were nothing better than dusty cuttings in the ground filled with brittle concave flakes of dried and sun-cracked mud.

*"Fuego hombres ! Everybody out !"*

I heard the shout in my semi-consciousness, having dozed off into a light, sweaty siesta. Startled, I came back to wide-eyed consciousness, my pulses racing as madly as the sharp ring of hoofs on the track while the foreman swept into the yard to make his report.

Section seventeen—about a mile from the house on the upland side of the farm—the worst possible location for a fire. There

was no water within a mile, either for drinking purposes or with which to fight the blaze. The land was heavy with sun-baked timber which had been felled and left in the sun to disintegrate. It was highly inflammable and almost impossible to extinguish once it got under way. Even buried roots would smoulder and ignite others. The course of the afternoon wind was such as to cause the flames to menace the entire enormous valley. Thousands of acres of tinder-dry bananas lay in the direct path of the flames.

The men moved sullenly toward the ever-growing blaze as it was whipped up by the blast of scorching dust-laden trade wind. You couldn't blame them for not wanting to face what they had to face.

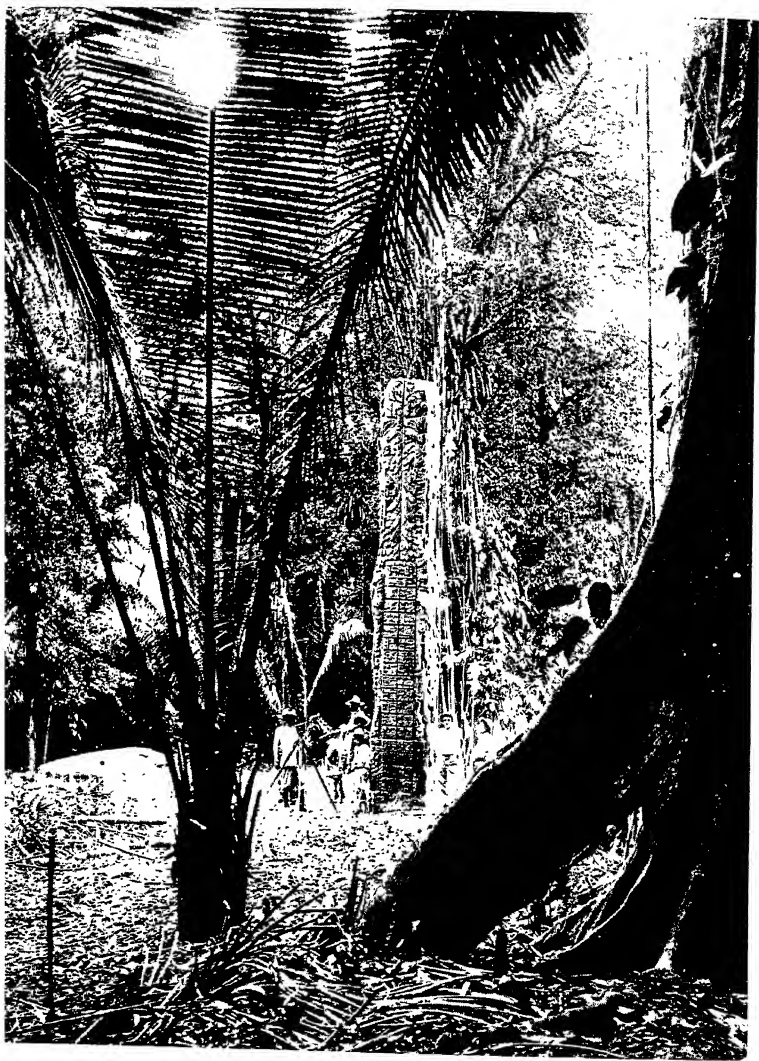
"All right, men," we shouted in Spanish. "Let's cut down every plant from this road up to the fire."

Down came row after row of plants. Machetes clipped low the brittle brush and grass. Rakes hastily scraped the land clean of all woody vegetation. Money and labour and sweat were pitted against that fire. Within an hour the men had cut a path through the farm through which ten trucks could drive abreast. The plants had been severed flush with the earth, the debris, green and brown, dragged back. Then the entire expanse had been raked, the layer of dry humus scraped up with flaying blades and the bare ground finally exposed. All racial differences and physical suffering were forgotten under the driving influence of those hissing sheets of flame. Men worked like demons, some stripped to the waist, their brown bodies bathed in sweat, all grunting and gasping with the terrific exertion of the fight.

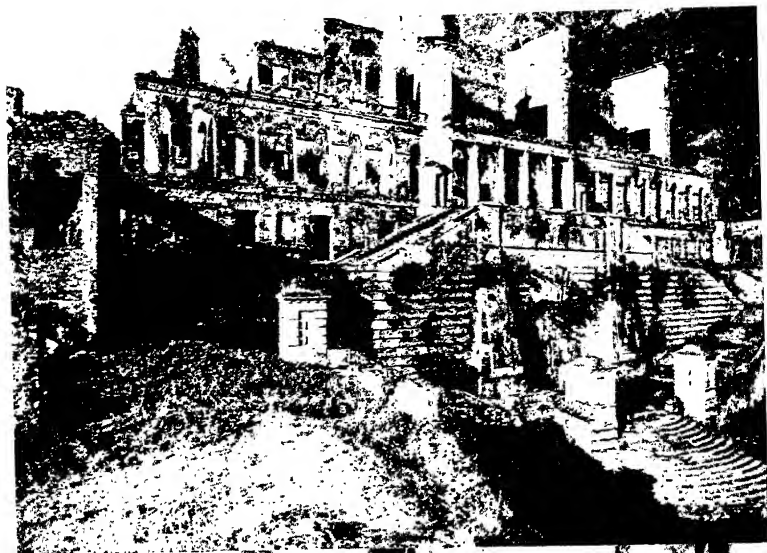
But it was to no avail. The afternoon sirocco, hot and dreadful, was gaining in power every moment. It was a race against time. Frenziedly the men slashed and beat at the burning trash. Abruptly the wind sprang up against them, whistling across the farm, fluttering the parched, brown leaves of a million dying plants, fanning the sparks into jagged, whip-cracking flames which waved and belled across the sky like giant sheets hung out to dry in the wind. Showers of embers went spinning crazily into the air, sky-rocketing



Scientists say that this interesting carved block of stone, which lies to-day in the Guatemalan jungle, is the finest example of aboriginal art existing in the Western Hemisphere.



At the dawn of the Christian era these monuments were carved with obsidian tools. So permanent and so beautifully carved were they, that to-day they still stand as clean cut and noble as they were when first erected—Quirigua, Guatemala.



*bove*

ll that is left of  
ristophe's palace,  
Sans Souci'—prob-  
bly the most mag-  
ficent structure ever  
nstructed in the  
mericas. It is located  
urteen miles from  
e harbour of Cap  
Haitien, Haiti.

*ight*

hrough these arches  
Sans Souci once  
ssed the aristocracy  
the world—proud  
pay homage to the  
lack man who  
umbled Napoleon—







Know why these San Blas Indian girls wear these gold nose-rings? Because, long ago, the men, during warfare, used to pay a line through the rings in the noses of their daughters and wives so their families would heel at a single touch of the line.

upward, then dripping like meteorites far beyond the puny fire break.

Yet as fast as a detail of men were lined up, checked and brought to the firing-line, a panting scout with dripping face would rush in to report a new blaze discovered in some section hundreds of yards beyond the clearing.

Beating our way from one gang to the next, delegating work to men, and then, discovering a job ten times more important—this was the order of the day. Eventually, inevitably, we would wind up right in advance of a wall of fire whose hot blast carried with it ash, charred particles and flaming embers, distributed in an ever-growing path as the flames drove down the valley. Twenty, thirty feet above, scarlet fingers snapped and writhed against the smoke-filled sky. The mules stamped nervously, swinging their rumps to the blaze, their delicate nostrils blowing and quivering. Underfoot all manner of wild-eyed rodents, mountain cats, ant-eaters thrashed blindly through the grass, fleeing the monster that sought them out with searing whips of flame wherever they might hide—be it in trees, on the surface of the earth or deep down in the soil.

Inferno on earth ! A searing sun overhead, a moving wall of flame, a scorching wind to fan it on !

What a contrast to the white colonial home so cool and inviting beneath the noble elms, with its brook and its lawn and the hollyhocks so brave against the stone wall. I thought of the New England lawn-sprinkler with the rainbows flashing in its spray. The dry salivary glands made my jaws ache at the thought. Was it possible I had once lived where a brook splashed and formed deep, cool pools in the shadow of the iris and the ferns ? I saw a vision of the lawn as it looked with the moonlight dappled across the glimmering grass and the purple shadows cast by the evergreens on the pearly dampness underfoot.

The wind abated at nightfall and the fires abated with it. But so tenacious a grip had they on the tinder-dry roots beneath the soil and on the fallen stumps in the farm that they could not be extinguished. Despite hours of chopping

and hacking great open fire roads, there was no man-made power that could combat the combination of fire and arson that confronted us.

I fell on my bed, still clothed, at midnight, so near physical collapse that knees and hands shook uncontrollably. There didn't seem to be any moisture left in my body. I couldn't seem to quench the raging thirst within me. No matter how much I drank, my parched system cried for more. I know I snatched a couple of quart bottles of water out of the ice-box, draining one in mighty gulps without taking my lips from the bottle, carrying the other to my bedside.

Lying there in the semi-darkness, my hot eyes came to rest on the moist flank of the full bottle. The glass was palest green (it had been originally a Gordon Gin bottle), the water within the palest blue. It glowed slightly with a translucence imparted by the dusk. Then closing my eyes I could see again that long narrow country club swimming-pool up north. At night, with the spot-lights on its surface and the adumbration of a row of electric bulbs below the surface, it gave off the identical effect of that bottle. It was maddening to think of slipping down into those lime depths, of arching through the air and plunging far down into that pool. How splendid it would be to slip into its refreshing depths, absorbing the cool water into my mouth, into my skin.

The bed was hot and crumpled. I tossed feverishly, unable to throw off the terrific heat I had absorbed during those long, bitter hours of fire-fighting.

The thought of food was repugnant, but I must have had a gallon of water before I finally slept. Then I dreamed—frightful, mad-paced figures on gigantic fire-breathing horses thundered through my fevered brain, always bearing down, for ever driving me away from water into a solid wall of flame. In my dreams, I ran, hid, dodged and even faced these demons, but always they forced me back, back into the heat. Pools of blood floated in films across my eyes. Larger and thinner they became, then shattered into a thousand tiny points of light; green, silver, and flame. They would recede

to the merest pin-pricks of light, then back they would come with frightful speed, showering down on my flesh, burning into my body, until my tortured writhing would awaken me again.

At dawn I opened my eyes and discovered that my bedding and clothes were soaked with perspiration. My limbs felt light and unreal. A sharp headache snapped and crackled like a radio spark behind my eyes. The thought and odour of food sent a sharp, nauseous secretion welling up into my throat.

Our tactics of the night before were no go. By mid-afternoon the farm was a raging horror of flame and heat. Some malignant human agency (was it some sulky peon who felt that he was entitled to two dollars more for his fruit cutting than he was getting, that was draining countless thousands of dollars in energy and crop by his fiendish activity? Could it be one of the very men who was out there hacking away with his machete and being paid for it, or the relative of a tubercular labourer we had been forced to eject for the good of the community's health?) together with that reliable afternoon trade wind was spelling our ruin.

Within a week from the original discovery of fire, over two thousand acres of producing banana land had been levelled from living fibre to ash. The desolation caused by a hurricane was as nothing compared to the ravages of fire. Then at least there had been an abundance of green. Now there were these horrible skeletons of trees, withered, sucked bone dry, protruding up from finely powdered ground the colour of slate. The entire labour and administrative force of the whole district had been pitted against the flames. All other work, fruit cutting included, had been put aside in that courageous, heart-breaking effort to stem the great advance. But day after day the afternoon wind had whipped up the sparks and fanned the checked flames into an ever-widening wall of fire. And day after day further isolated evidences of pyromania brought home the fact that our enemies were still promiscuous with lighted cigarette butts. Every morning we of the administrative staff would roll out of bed at dawn and

lumber out on the porch, blinking the sleep from our eyes in order to study the sky. But it was uniformly cloudless, clear and infinite. And the river beds were flaked with countless criss-cross crusts as dry and smooth as pottery fresh from the kiln.

Literally weeks went by with the fire gaining in body and distribution every day. Fire-fighting was on a twenty-four hour basis, and before the end came there were close to fifty white overseers and timekeepers from various districts supervising the battle, with hundreds and hundreds of labourers stubbornly fighting along the two-mile front line of fire advance.

Looking back on it, I cannot help but grow philosophical considering that all of these heat-crazed hours of work, thousands of man-power worth, meant nothing, whereas when the beneficent Deity found time to put aside more important work and look down with his inevitable, infinite compassion upon our giant pyre, all that was necessary was a sudden whining of wind that could be heard for the first time above the snap and roar of the fire. All that was necessary was a fire-fighting crew of thick pearl-coloured clouds that quite unexpectedly came marching over the mountain-top one dawn—calmly dumped their contents of several million gallons of rain water over the mess.

Have you ever poured water into a grease-simmering frying-pan? If so, you will know how it hisses and steams. You also know how eventually it cools off. That is precisely what happened, and within twenty-four hours the battlefield that had been flaming red for so long lay stark and grey and barren—soaked through and through, and as devoid of life as a forsaken, shell-ridden battle-field.

BOOK THREE

Giants in the Tropical Earth



## *Amateur Archæology*

THERE is a whole croup of 'ologies that scare the wits out of us amateurs and at the same time are so impressive that we feel that any lay questions raised would simply expose us to ridicule. Therefore we keep our hands off and keep our opinions to ourselves. During my years in tropical America I ran around with and acted as guide for many scientists, and with practically no exception found them all tremendously jealous of their scientific prerogatives. This may be all very well in the medical profession. True, it ill becomes an amateur to diagnose an ailment and prescribe a remedy. In such cases a little knowledge is more dangerous than none at all. But let us consider archæology—as applied to the Caribbean. How can it hurt anything here for the amateur to shoot off his mouth about the Maya civilization—particularly so when the genuine dyed-in-the-wool archæologists cannot answer the questions themselves?

The Greeks had a word for it all right: archæology means simply the science of antiquities, concerned with the systematic investigation of the relics of man and his industries, and the classification and treatment of his remains and relics. Now why should some stuffed shirt, financed by a foundation, necessarily be better qualified to systematically investigate relics in the jungles of Central America than a young squirt on the ground, with a lot of energy and a passion for learning? Conceded, when it comes to analysing the age of an exhumed shard (archæological term for a fragment of pottery) or deciphering the carved hieroglyphics on an ancient animal-shaped stone or monument (known to the trade as 'zoomorphs' and 'stelæ'—for no reason that I have been



able to discern except to shroud in complicated nomenclature the simple elements dealt with) the amateur is out of his class. Egyptologists have demonstrated their superiority and it is up to us amateurs to bow before their superior wisdom. But in the case of the ancient peoples of the middle Americas the scientists have not progressed far enough yet for us to fall down and worship at their feet. Not by a damn sight ! They cannot tell us very much more about the ancient tribes than we could learn for ourselves. The key to the secret of the Mayas is the translation of their glyphs, and the accepted way to accomplish this is by a study of their ancient writings ('codices' if you're a Ph.D.) and in the case of the Central American aborigines these early books were destroyed by the Spaniards back in the days of Hernando Cortez.<sup>1</sup> So this is no indictment : Lacking codices, the scientists are not much better qualified than the amateur's ; it becomes a matter of grubbing about—and there are keenly intelligent whites and nationals, on the ground, eminently qualified to show the softies from the Museums and cloistered halls of knowledge, where to go, how to go, what to eat while going, what language to speak, what means of transportation to employ and how to get the peons to work when on location. Countless square miles of unexplored territory continue to reveal to those with the courage, vitality and intelligence to explore, crumbling ruins, ancient cities, tumbled-down palaces and other vestiges of a race that sprang from the dust and returned to it : No sir ! These archæological discoveries are no more restricted to the Rockefeller Foundation than the discovery of a new gusher is to the Standard Oil Company !

According to the dictionary, the science of archæology breaks down into three classifications : the search for and study of things written, things monumental, and things traditional. Bearing in mind that this discussion relates strictly to middle American archæology, the written feature

<sup>1</sup> Lest the purists be offended, be it known that out of the holocaust of books destroyed by the Spaniards during the conquest, three works *did* survive : the *Dresden Codex*, *Codex Peresianus*, and the *Troano-Cortesian Codex*—all notable for their paucity of historical material.

may be eliminated at once because there isn't any to speak of. I have already pointed out that things monumental may be brought to light by a twenty-one-year-old coffee planter just as well as a Doctor of Science—and the odds-on favourite is the former. Traditionally, the student of Latin American affairs on the ground and in contact with the natives, labourers, merchants, peons and others, has an equal or better opportunity of developing something than the subsidized scientist who comes down with his medicine chest of quinine and snake venine, textbooks and divining rod, and a sublime ignorance of the none-too-gentle art of how to get along in the tropics.

Lest the impression is given here of being unduly bitter about all this, let it be known that the subject has been hashed over with many archæologists, the conclusion remains, however, that with the exception of the conscientious work of reproducing and reconstructing fallen buildings by the Carnegie Foundation and the scholarly correlation of the ancient Maya calendar in terms of the Georgian by Dr. Herbert Spinden of the Peabody Institute, about all the learned brethren have developed is an acrimonious dispute as to whence came the jade that has been discovered in Yucatan, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, and how the ancient tribes of the Western World were able to visualize the elephants that they carved on their monuments, when one bears in mind that these pachyderms are not indigenous to the Western Hemisphere and could not possibly be constructed in the minds of these simple folk prior to the era of Barnum and Bailey ! And that, considering the glory that was once the Mayan, is not much !

The term 'American' has come to imply *North American*. When we talk about Americans we think of people who live North of the Rio Grande and who drive in four-door sedans, get their ice out of frigidaire, own vacuum cleaners and radios—and vote the Democratic ticket. Unhappily, we are immigrants and the real Americans are those whose American descent could be reckoned by thousands of years where we count ours by generations. The archæologists start at this

point and take issue with themselves right away, one school asserting that the original inhabitants of the Western World have been here since time immemorial, stemming from the lower forms of mammalian life, *pari passu* with Man in the Old World, the other taking the position that the early North Americans came over from Asia. At once there's controversy: the latter group snarling and snapping at the former's heels. One faction stands for the theory that these original Asiatics came across by way of Bering Strait, gradually working southward as far as Mexico and Central America and eventually to the lower end of South America, while their opponents subscribe to the theory that there was a time when a pathway existed between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, a lost continent, variously known as Atlantis and Mu.

The long and the short of the matter is that nobody knows. Certainly the Far-Eastern influence is discernible even to the lay eye. Some of the Mayan carvings in Honduras and Guatemala executed about the time of the birth of the Christian Era, and still intact, are so reminiscent of the faces, ornaments and carvings of Angkor Wat and Java that photographs of the two influences can only be identified by experts who have visited both the sources. This does not entitle one school of archæology to assert that the Asiatic influence in this world must have come across from Alsaka or by way of an alleged ancient pathway since sloughed off into the sea. When I was a kid in San Francisco it was no uncommon occurrence for Japanese seamen to be washed ashore off the Golden Gate in a moribund condition through lack of food and water and through exposure to the elements. Resuscitated, those hardy souls who lived to tell the tale reported that their little craft had ventured to the uttermost rim of the fishing banks off Japan and had been caught by the tides and the trades to be washed willy-nilly clear across the vast Pacific. If these men could experience this and live to tell the tale, what was to stop those doughty sea-going Orientals in the days of Kubla Khan from manning and staffing their catamarans and *deliberately setting their sails to cross the Western sea?* But, of course, they could never return, because the trades didn't blow that way.

All this preamble to give you the thought that the ancient folk of Central America may just as conceivably reveal their secrets to *you* as to the learned gentry in cap-and-gown. This is not an arrogant and unstudied opinion. More than fifteen years ago, quite by happen-chance, my mule stumbled across the remnants of an ancient Mayan city near the banks of the Ulua River, a hundred kilometres inland from the Atlantic seaboard of Honduras. What did I do? The first thing was to write North for books on the Mayan civilization. The second was to excavate this discovery and see what lay beneath the perfectly formed twenty-foot high mounds which bounded a rectangular courtyard of the general shape of a tennis court and about ten times its size. Well, what came to light? Stones mostly—stones that had been built by hand into walls; stones that had been hewn by hand and stones that had been carved by hand. Pottery, too—some specimens intact and others shattered into a hundred bits. There were luminous green ornaments which I took to be jade. And bones of men and women.

This site was adjacent to the Ulua River. The thing to do next was to paddle along the eroded bank, because surely if there had been an ancient city so close to the banks of the river the probability was that the civilization extended right up to the river just as our own would—and does (try to buy waterfront property in Westchester or Long Island to-day). Honduras being a country of tremendous rainfalls and droughts, the river was constantly falling away from, or gnawing into, its banks. The result was mile upon mile of exposed vertical soil—a cross-section as it were—which fairly bristled with bones and pottery and other ancient remains. Here, for instance, was partially revealed the skeleton of a woman whose arms had been folded across her breast and whose cherished possessions of pottery were set beside her. About the bones of the neck lay a series of graduated green beads from which the string had centuries ago rotted away. Those beads led into her mouth. The enamel was still on her teeth, and after exhuming the skull, a jade amulet was found, which must have rested on her tongue.

Months later there arrived those two volumes by Stephens on his travels in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan, back in the middle of the nineteenth century, which were profusely illustrated by the steel engravings of an artist named Catherwood. These meticulously executed enlargements of the hieroglyphics on the buildings at Uxmal, Chichen Itza and Palenque—the great Mayan cities of Southern Mexico—enabled me to identify the little left profile carved in that amulet with an identical profile carved into the frieze of one of these great structures. What more incentive could a layman ask to get hot about this subject of Central American archæology?

The casual Caribbean traveller to-day may easily and comfortably visit the most magnificent of the Maya cities; both ships and aeroplanes serve the Yucatan peninsula—and there are really good hotels and inns within a stone's throw of many of these scenes of ancient culture. Ships and railways—with just a dash of mule here and there—bring Central America's ruins to hand. Archæology, then, truly becomes anybody's party!

Because their history is so baffling, the early inhabitants of the littoral facing the Caribbean from the Isthmus of Yucatan on down to Puerto Bello in Panama and then eastward into Colombia and Venezuela have become the favourite topic of the archæologist to-day. Whether the Pre-Colombian American infiltrated by way of Alaska or by the open roadstead of the Pacific is of little significance compared to the fact that at some time during the population of the New World, civilizations developed in Central America that left imperishable monuments and carvings. We know that they worked out a calendar every bit as accurate as our own, and through this calendar our scientists have been able to deduce that certain monuments erected fourteen centuries before Columbus was living expressed important astrological and natural phenomena. We know also that these early inhabitants developed an agriculture based upon such native products as corn, potatoes and manioc (unknown to the Old World) and that these

staple foods assured the Central American tribes of sufficient freedom to develop their culture. Perhaps this explains why the New World people worshipped their gods of agriculture, symbolizing the natural forces which controlled the harvest rather than the emotional gods deified in the Eastern World.

These early Americans were undoubtedly one of the great races of the Western World. The Mayas were to Central America what the Quichuas were to Peru and the Aztecs to Mexico. All the highbrows in archaeology and ethnology agree that the Mayas contributed the greatest share of intellectual culture to the Western Hemisphere. Sylvanus Morley, in charge of the Maya explorations under the aegis of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, and probably the recognized authority in the field of American archaeology, has said: 'All things considered, the Maya may be regarded as having developed the highest aboriginal civilization in the Western Hemisphere, although it should be borne in mind that they were surpassed in many lines of endeavour by other races. The Quichua, for example, excelled them in the arts of weaving and dyeing, the Chiriqui (of Northern Panama) in metal working, and the Aztec in military proficiency.'

Added to this testimonial comes one from Herbert J. Spinden: 'Artists everywhere are of the opinion that the sculptures and other products of the Mayas deserve to rank among the highest art products of the world, and astronomers are amazed at the progress made by this people in the measuring of time by the observed movements of the heavenly bodies. Moreover, they invented a remarkable system of hieroglyphic writing by which they were able to record facts and events, and they built great cities of stone that attest a degree of wealth and splendour beyond anything seen elsewhere in the New World.'

Let's be careful not to cram too much science down our throats. Let's continue to approach this fascinating and profound subject from the lay viewpoint and lop off as much of the nonsense and involved phraseology as possible. But let's not be bluffed out of an honest opinion: putting it vulgarly, doesn't there seem to be something 'phoney'

about the Maya civilization? Surely something was responsible for the rise of these Indians, *something* was responsible for the astonishing remnants that they left, and *something* must account for their sudden, inexplicable departure from the scene. In short, where *did* they come from, what *did* they do, and where the hell did they go?

A gentleman by the name of Alfred Maudsley,<sup>1</sup> an English archæologist, links the Toltec with the Mayas, inclining to the belief that the Mayas themselves once lived upon the Mexican plateau and that they were driven south into Yucatan, Guatemala, and Honduras by the invasion of Nahua hordes stemming from the Aztec stock, superior in military prowess but of much ruder culture. In other words, Maudsley doesn't know where they came from and *neither does anybody else!*

Living in the interior of Honduras and Guatemala, one frequently encounters *mozos* who either come to the house laden with pots, primitive implements, and hand-made ornaments which they have accidentally dug up, or with wild stories of hidden cities crumbling away beneath the jungle. In the former case one can purchase these tangible examples of the ancient Maya culture, and, as a matter of fact, it was through this means that Minor C. Keith (his biographical sketch appears later in this book) collected his treasures of jade, gold, and obsidian which he later presented to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. In the latter instance, however, white men have had notoriously poor luck. This does not mean that crumbling cities fail to exist in the jungle. They do. And undoubtedly there are plenty of old sites yet to be found. But the more massive and important pyramids and temples that the peons whisper about in such awe somehow seem to elude them when the expedition gets under way!

What it boils down to is this: exploration of the jungle is laborious and cruelly taxing and fruitful only after repeated failures—but when a 'find' is made—then listen to the Press and the societies beat the drum!

Consider Quirigua, an ancient Maya city of the 'Old

<sup>1</sup> Maudsley's important archæological findings were published under the title of *Biologia Centrali-Americana*.

Empire'—the earliest period of Mayan civilization, if we limit the application of this word to the centuries during which the Mayas used a written language. Quirigua is approximately sixty kilometres inland from Guatemala's one important Atlantic seaport—Barrios. It is in the heart of the banana belt. It is probable that Hernando Cortez, conqueror of Mexico, must have passed within a few miles of Quirigua on his march to the Gulf of Honduras in 1525. Perhaps he marched right through Quirigua without sensing any undue significance in the lichen-covered, sombre grey monuments and the silt-covered mounds of that jungle city which had even then suffered the buffets of Nature's rain and sun and jungle growth for nearly a thousand years. It was not until 1840 that our friends Stephens and Catherwood stumbled across Quirigua and made it known to the world. Other archæologists messed around with the ruins, but it was not until 1910 that Sylvanus Morley and Edgar Hewett undertook a series of investigations there resulting in the partial reconstruction of two of the principal edifices, and resulting also in making this ancient site Guatemala's most popular rubberneck spot for the tourist public.

Anybody who can do so should visit Quirigua. It is only a few hundred yards from the railway tracks. Cut straight through the steaming banana fields and hop the tiny stream gurgling beneath mammoth leaves. Plunge on into the jungle. Overhead a solid lacing of branches and vines support parasitic streamers and flaming aerial vegetation. Enormous trees: cedar, mahogany, sapotas, cacao, dragon, and rubber, strike upward through clutching undergrowth that gives off a heady musky bouquet, sickeningly sweet. There is a certain amount of mosquito-slapping involved, but it's nothing like the *matto grosso* or 'Green Hell' stuff. There are no bushmasters, boa constrictors, mountain leopards, or other malignant agencies lying in wait, prepared to deal out instant death. A party can even go in with a pair of flannel pants and tennis shoes.

The first glimpse of Quirigua conveys the impression of a



great open courtyard shaded by giant trees and sparsely planted to bananas. It is bounded at either end by large mounds—dirt and jungle-covered remnants of once beautiful buildings. Flanking the sides of this 'great plaza' are a series of monuments, each heavily carved with hieroglyphics and religious symbols which are said to mark definite periods in time and the historical accomplishments that occurred during such time. They are sculptured on two sides with human figures in flamboyant headdresses and carrying elaborate symbols of power. Two things impress the casual visitor about these monuments: the first, their astonishing state of preservation, the way they have remained in a vertical position since the dawn of the Christian era; second, the truly remarkable expressions on the carved faces of the priests: high intelligence is there—and brutal will: flat, bold foreheads, African noses, large, round ears that bulge, lower lips, protruding half-sulkily, half-sensuously . . . women with delicate features, narrow noses, finely etched lips, surrounded by highly formalized symbols of fertility—astonishingly life-like in their arrogance and self-assurance.

In addition to the monuments there are also several large round boulders carved to represent crouching animals. Some are so highly conventionalized that it is difficult to determine just what animals they are supposed to be, but the jaguar and frog are among those more easily recognizable. These boulders, as a rule, have a head at either end; the eyes are astronomical symbols and the bodies are richly carved with hieroglyphics and decorations. Among these animal boulders is one in particular that is said to be the finest example of aboriginal art yet discovered in the New World. It is an enormous boulder highly covered with deeply carved decorations. Heads of humans, animals, and serpents—all fantastically distorted—adorn the body of this strange and awe-inspiring creation of the Mayan mind. Directly behind this boulder are steps which lead to the top of the great mound at the far end of the plaza. It is not difficult to imagine that this terrace overlooking the scene, and particularly the elaborate boulder directly beneath it, was once the stamping

ground of the mighty. Could it be possible that those deeply cut channels on the top surface of that boulder may have been designed to drain off the blood of human sacrifices?

Why not? The ancient Mexican Nahuas, as well as their descendants in Central America, celebrated certain feasts that involved human sacrifice. So did the Aztecs. Pushing Indian maidens into depthless lakes was not the only form of sacrifice they resorted to, either. They used to lay victims out on sacrificial stones just like that one at Quirigua and cut out their palpitating hearts with obsidian knives!

Regard Quirigua for a moment as a stage setting: dusty, silent, forsaken. Now people it in your mind with actors and actresses: it is morning—some fifteen hundred years ago. The sunlight throws its brilliant pencils of light down through the trees and across the clean-swept plaza. Back in the jungle, smoke curls idly upward from hundreds of open hearts. Men are moving off in chattering gangs to attend to their agriculture. Others are working on the great stone highway whose projected terminus only the chieftains know. The women in their huts are pounding maize and suckling their young. Here is a girl, nearly twelve years old, whose eyes gleam brightly in anticipation of the baptismal ceremony in store for her this day as she and forty other boys and girls enter their majority. As she swings lightly across the plaza to the water-well with her jar you observe her slender brown body is practically naked, with the exception of one curious adornment—a large open shell that protects her sex—which she has worn as a symbol from the age of three. After to-day it will be gone. And then——

Being young and this her day of days, she loiters in the Plaza and watches the slaves drag a massive block of stone from the quarry across the way to the uncompleted portion of the Sun Temple. Rollers formed by tree trunks enable the groaning and perspiring men to advance this giant block. A priest supervising the work raises his claw-like hand and his long whip of deer hide whistles through the air, descending upon the quivering back of an elderly slave, searing the flesh and raising a sullen blue weal.

Now visitors from other cities commence pouring into the Plaza, dusty and laden with bales of merchandise. The sound of flutes and drums breaks out and a procession of the sacrificing Godmen swings past. The girl prostrates herself in the dust, her shell tinkling as she falls. Timidly she peers at them through her hands. Impressive and terrible they are, gilded, masked, and swathed in brilliant garments. They disappear up the great staircase and the girl flies home with her young heart beating high in anticipation of the part she will play in the ceremony that day.

As the hours wear on the young girls and boys assemble before the temple while the guests and the great feast on venison, turkey, maize, and cacao, gorging themselves with food served on wide leaves and drinking deep of pulque from dripping gourds. Steadily the tempo of drums increases in its beat. Chanting is heard from the inner walls of the great temple and slaughtered animals add their dying screams and the odour of their blood to the incense and the smoke and the warm smell of tropical fertility. There will be human blood shed over the great sacrifice stone that day—human hearts will be cut from clean virgin breasts by sharp obsidian knives in the merciless hands of the Godmen. The priests will hold aloft these dripping hearts, still writhing in systole and diastole, flinging them finally at the feet of the idol of rejuvenation. Who cares about the dead bodies that thump down the side of the dripping sacrificial stone? There are dogs that will take care of them. There are other fantastic ceremonies to be enacted within the walls of the sacred temple ere night shall fall—just what, only the eager-eyed youngsters who enter those gloomy portals can tell. One thing is certain! The little girl with her fine brown body and silly little shell who bravely goes into the temple—stumbles out a woman, with fear on her face and clothing on her body—but the shell is gone—forever gone!

## *'The Dear, Dead Days of Henry Morgan'*

ONCE you get cruising around the Spanish Main, whether as a student, resident, or traveller, you are certain to encounter the backwash of the pirates. Let your vessel steam through the gates of the Caribbean and swing south to Jamaica or Haiti, or over toward Yucatan and down the coast of Central America, or perhaps south-by-east, touching at the glittering jewels in that gorgeous diadem known as the Lesser Antilles, and you are bound to be following one of the great sea trails of the buccaneers. To recapitulate the orgies and depravities, the incredible brutalities and adventures of the 'brethren of the coast,' is the work of an historian. Our only concern with these thugs of yesteryear relates to their influence as it may affect the traveller of to-day. Up for discussion are their treasures, progeny, and the remnants of what they did—and more particularly what they undid along the sea lanes being traversed right now!

Exhibit A is unquestionably Port Royal. At present it is a sandspit facing Kingston, Jamaica, where are housed a handful of Quarantine officials and a few other inhabitants. They are building an automobile road out there at present to give the casual visitor an opportunity to motor over the same ground and along the same palm-lined shores where some two and a half centuries ago, bearded ruffians, whose clothes were spotted with blood (not theirs), squandered in repellent drunkenness and lechery, pocketsful of 'Pieces-of-Eight' which had been wrested from innocent victims after torture, murder, and rape.

A gentle and forsaken spot—Port Royal. By day her

ruins and shacks shimmer in the glaring rays of the torrid sun with no sign of life along the sandy straits. In the stillness of the night she sleeps the profound sleep of the innocent, even as a tiny child born of wicked parents. The silence is disturbed only by the gentle thresh of the sounding sea. Silver beams of moonlight filter through the graceful palm trees, their noble trunks silhouetted against the luminous night sky, as though here was peace everlasting. . . .

No kidding—can this be the Port Royal where anchored fleets whose gaping holds disgorged chests of coins, studded candlesticks, golden crucifixes (many whitewashed by the padres in pitiful attempt to make their holy treasures appear to be wooden), bales of silk and velvet, casks, firkins, and kegs containing choice liquors from the cellars of grandees in Cartagena and Porto Bello? All kidding aside, can this be that famous stronghold of the pirate world through whose streets, in the days of Lieutenant-Governor Henry Morgan, swarmed thousands of hoodlums, swapping stories, swapping loot, bragging of the rings they had wrenched or cut from the hands of dying women, whose favours they had availed themselves of beforehand? Even the most brazen cruise conductor dares not take his covey of ingenuous passengers out to this sun-baked sand flat and expect them to believe that they are standing on the site once dubbed by imaginative real-estate gentry variously as :

THE NAUGHTIEST PLACE ON EARTH

BABYLON OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

PORT OF ORGIES

HOME OF THE MOST HIDEOUSLY RUTHLESS MISCREANTS THAT  
EVER DISGRACED EARTH AND SEA

THE MOST WICKED CITY IN THE WORLD

Yet, actually, in 1668 when New York had only five hundred homes, Port Royal boasted a population of some eight thousand souls. The buildings of Port Royal were at that time as dear-rented as if they stood in the well-traded streets of

London.<sup>1</sup> In the streets of Port Royal strutted the drunken swashbucklers whose names were as greatly feared in their time as Billy the Kid in his, or Public Enemies Numbers One to Ten inclusive to-day. There was Francis D'Ollonois, whose proud boast was that he could hack a man to pieces, tear out his heart, and gnaw it with his teeth like a ravenous wolf, turning then to his followers with the comment, "I will serve you all alike if you show me not another way." He was but one of many and it does seem as though it were truly a visitation of the Infinite that old Port Royal should be shaken into the sea.

It happened at high noon on 7 June 1692. First there came a premonitory shudder, a quivering tremor which rattled the houses and rocked the piers. Another and another. Pirates, women, slaves, and domestic animals charged out of houses, inns, and cellars, but before they could move a hundred yards in their blind rush for they knew not where, a devastating quake threw them flat. There was a sickening, thundering roar of water, the rushing drive of millions of tons of power—a force beyond all human comprehension. The drive of the sea smote cleanly across the breakwater—Port Royal became one with Nineva and Tyre!

A city under the sea, but only fifty feet or so! Small wonder that treasure hunters swarm to Jamaica to-day to study the lay-out of Port Royal. That vast stores of imperishable wealth are lying fallow in the landlocked harbour is beyond dispute. Problem: how to get at it, whether by bathoscope, submarine, or diving bell. . . .

Pick up any piece of cruise literature to-day relating to Jamaica and you are almost certain to read of the legend that the sunken city of Port Royal remains intact beneath the sea and that her bells may be heard mournfully tolling whenever the swell is still. This may strike you as being a rare example of imaginative copy writing, but once having looked into the matter (and the pellucid water) and having read the great masters, you will admit that men like Thomas de Quincey

<sup>1</sup> Richard Blome in *A Description of the Island of Jamaica*, published in 1672 at London.

could spot our first magnitude advertising writers plenty and still romp home ! Listen to this excerpt from De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* :

' God smote Port Royal, and in one day, by earthquake, removed her, with all her towers standing and population staring, from the steadfast foundations of the shore to the coral floors of ocean. And God said : " Pompeii did I bury, and conceal from men through seventeen centuries : this city I will bury, but not conceal. She shall be a monument to men of My mysterious anger, set in azure light through generations to come ; for I will enshrine her in a crystal dome of My tropic seas."

' This city, therefore, like a mighty galleon with all her apparel mounted, streamers flying, and tackling perfect, seems floating along the noiseless depths of ocean ; and oftentimes in glassy calms, through the translucid atmosphere of water that now stretches like an air-woven awning above the silent encampment, mariners from every clime look down into her courts and terraces, count her gates and number the spires of her churches. She is one ample cemetery, and has been for many a year ; but in the mighty calms that breed for weeks over tropic latitudes, she fascinates the eye with a Fata-Morgana revelation, as of human life still subsisting in submarine asylums sacred from the storms that torment our upper air.

' Thither, lured by the loveliness of cerulean depths, by the peace of human dwellings privileged from molestation, by the gleam of marble altars sleeping in everlasting sanctity, oftentimes in dreams did I and the Dark Interpreter cleave the watery veil that divided us from her streets. We looked into the belfries, where the pendulous bells were waiting in vain for the summons which should awaken their marriage peals ; together we touched the mighty organ-keys that sang no jubilates for the ear of Heaven, that sang no requiems for the ear of human sorrow ; together we searched the silent nurseries, where the children were all asleep, and had been asleep through five generations. " They are waiting for the heavenly

dawn," whispered the Interpreter to himself: "and when that comes, the bells and the organs will utter a jubilate repeated by the echoes of Paradise."

Port Royal's sub-oceanic existence may be mythical, but the Caribbean bristles with palpable evidence of the pirates. Consider Morro Castle at the gateway of Havana harbour. To-day her corridors, dungeons, and moats are clean-swept and her cobblestones ring with the precise marching of Cuban cadets. Nevertheless, could it but speak, this grim fortress might disclose many a gory story of the pirate days. Even more impressive is the Morro Castle at the entrance to Santiago harbour at the other end of the island. There will be found not only a main fortification but a fascinating congeries of subterranean tunnels leading to tiny enfilades strung along the tortuous entrance to that historic harbour. Or examine the extensive and massive fortifications and sea-walls at Cartagena, Colombia. The main bulwark of defence in this ancient apple-of-the-pirate-eye is wide enough on top to permit four motor cars to pass without any difficulty. It is reminiscent of the great walls about Peking. And there are no end of mouldy passages leading from the top of the wall down at sharp angles to various forsaken escapes that emerge right at the margin of the sea. Here, too, are dungeons, some of them below sea-level. There is not a single note of modernity about these massive walls save that as you come back into the blessed sunlight after being guided through the maze there is bound to be the inevitable gathering of beggars and amateur rhumba players bidding for your money and attention.

Cartagena was one of the main ports connecting the Old World with the New, whence came the treasures from Peru to be transported across the sea for the aggrandizement of debauched kings. Naturally, Henry Morgan and his followers cracked down. It cost the Spanish crown some twenty million golden pesos to build the impregnable fortification at Cartagena and of all of the remnants to-day that bespeak the age of the pirates none compares to her scarified sea walls.



Similar massive forts, all reflecting the Spanish influence, may still be found along the Caribbean at Trujillo, Honduras, at Porto Bello, Panama, and at other now forsaken ports far from the beaten path.

The first time I saw Porto Bello was through the window of a giant amphibian 'plane which was carrying my party of moving-picture folk down to the San Blas Islands. There sprawled the fort, grey and green, casting a ponderous shadow across the narrow beach and into the turquoise shallows of the sea. There glistened the splashes of red of tiled roofs, the wavering pencils of smoke rising from open hearths as the fishing fleet idly rocked at anchor. Behind and beyond lay the green of the jungle on the one hand, and the ever-deepening blue of the sea on the other. Gone for centuries was any indication of the famous pack-mule trail which led from Porto Bello across the Isthmus and down the western slope of South America. Yet, some two hundred and fifty years ago, Henry Morgan recruited nine vessels and five hundred men and swept down upon galleons loading gold in those placid waters below. Morgan's strategy was characteristic: he made a night assault, gagged the sentries as he encountered them, took the first fort after a short but hot engagement, herded all the native officers and men into the dungeon after they had surrendered, and then blew the building to bits. Naturally, the soldiers in the next fort stood not upon the order of their going!

When Morgan encountered resistance he usually directed his attention to nunneries and monasteries. He had his men throw together wide ladders whose rungs were strong enough to bear three men abreast. The buccaneers put the sword to monks and nuns, forcing them to raise the ladders against the walls of the fort, and go over the top ahead of the raiders. Morgan counted upon the religious fervour of his opponents to keep them from firing upon these innocent children of God. But in the case of the sack of Porto Bello he reckoned without the Governor, who offered the most stubborn resistance. Morgan's religious screen in this instance was no protection to

the pirates except that monks and nuns stopped many bullets intended for the men behind them. Nevertheless, Morgan took Porto Bello and proceeded to put to torture every citizen he could find in or around the town. Sir Henry had great faith in fire—as applied to human flesh. He discovered that burning human feet and stringing victims in hammocks above slow fires developed much information as regards the location of hidden treasures. It was nothing to him whether a hundred poor people suffered and died provided one of them screamed out a confession that led him to gold. The result was that he swung back triumphantly to Port Royal with two hundred and fifty thousand ‘Pieces-of-Eight.’

On the outskirts of Panama City stand the proud remnants of the old original Panama—the Panama that Henry burned and pillaged on his second trip to the Isthmus. They say that even to-day ambitious tourists willing to strip down to the waist and wield a spade may confidently expect to strike through the rich loam and turn up a shovelful of coins or an old iron box. The authorities don’t approve of this, and quite naturally, as it is a shrine. But the American tourist was never one to be unduly respectful of foreign shrines. Ground or temple hallowed by the worship of ages is, alas, but an open book to our travellers—a book wherein they may scrawl their names and addresses—and perhaps a drawing or a bit of extemporaneous pornography.

Be that as it may, Morgan swept south from Port Royal with two thousand men and thirty-seven vessels—the largest flotilla ever assembled under the Black Peter. Unfortunately there was no Panama Canal in those days and Henry had to march his men across the Isthmus on foot through the tropical jungle. For six days and nights the buccaneers plunged through the swamp, whacking mosquitoes, cursing their luck, scooping the green scum from the surface of lagoon water so that they might drink, even soaking leather saddlebags in hot water and pounding them to a paste to be roasted and voraciously consumed. Hardy souls, these pirates. You can imagine how they felt when they finally achieved the plateau and saw the fair city of Panama before them. Food !

Loot ! Wine ! Women !! Meanwhile the resident Spaniards on the Pacific side had ample warning and thought they were ill set.

They had the best artillery that the wealth of old Madrid could buy. They had thick walls and ten times as many ribs as the roughnecks from the lower east side. Also, through the colossal genius of their bonehead Governor, they had corraled twenty thousand wild bulls from the grazing and when they heard that Morgan was coming, and which they considered their collective *pièce de résistance* against the onslaught of the pirates.

History does not record any greater fiasco. The gates were flung open and the bulls driven forth to trample underfoot the scum of Port Royal. It soon developed that the buccaneers were the hell of a sight tougher than the bulls. After all, the bulls had been eating regularly !

Such a barbecue ! And held right there where the Spaniards' eyes could witness the slaughter and their nostrils could savour the fragrant odour of fresh beef. And when the boys had eaten their fill and caught up with their rest they threw themselves upon the defenders of the city with irresistible fury, losing less than a hundred men as they stormed and took Panama.

Morgan's first bulletin issued to his men from within the walls of the captured city was the palpable falsehood : ' Don't touch the wine. I have secret information that it is all poisoned.' Henry knew the proclivities of his men all right and he was right in trying to fox them, because there was heavy work to be done that night. But there were plenty of birds and beasts in the city—parrots, monkeys, dogs and other pets—down whose astonished gullets was forced many a test swig. And if you've never seen a drunken parrot or hen, you've got an experience in store for you. (Come to think of it, there was a chap who worked on a coco-nut plantation in Costa Rica who had a pet rooster to which he used to forcibly administer a spoonful of Johnny Walker Black Label every Saturday night. The bird would then become highly erotic and aggressive. There was great business of chest being

thrown out, much strutting around and a constant effort to stand up on tiptoe and crow a message to the world—all culminating in complete collapse. The crowing sounded like nothing so much as a victrola record running down, but all the other manifestations were highly reminiscent of *genus homo* putting on the same kind of an act in a night club. There is a moral here, chums.)

The proud city of Panama was one sheet of flame against the sky that night. In the morning it was a shambles of smouldering ruins. The ashes and the embers have gone back into the soil centuries since, but the shell of Panama's ancient skyscraper still remains for us to see to-day.

Late in July of 1937 there appeared in the public prints an astonishing story of a yield of thousands of pounds of gold ingots stamped with the Spanish royal crown discovered in a now abandoned section of the Isthmus of Panama. This treasure was estimated at a value of three million dollars, of which the government of Panama was to get half and the three discoverers of the treasure (two North Americans and a German) the other half. A posse of thirty armed Panamanians was immediately dispatched to guard the gold and prevent a swarming army of treasure seekers from entering the cave. Meanwhile the Panama government arranged to send trucks to the area and aeroplanes to the nearest landing field so that the gold might be transported back to civilization before the aborigines and bandits of the interior might attack and make away with it. In the next few days the newspaper stories became increasingly fantastic, culminating with the report that one of the three discoverers, who was leading the natives to the cache, requested his followers to remain outside the cave while he first went in to see if everything was in order. He drew out his machete and hacked his way into the black mouth of the tunnel. There followed a shot, whereupon the party rushed in and found this alleged one-third owner of a vast fortune lying on the mouldy, bat-festered ground, bleeding from the mouth, with a shot through the right side of his head.

P.S. The ingots were not there !

P.P.S. The other two men whose names were linked with the original discovery of the treasure professed to know nothing whatsoever about it !

Now, let's go back to Henry Morgan for a minute. History tells us that when he turned back toward the Atlantic and toward his waiting flotilla, one hundred and seventy-five pack animals and six hundred prisoners had been assembled and heavily laden with his spoils. History further records that at the rear of this procession through the jungle was one Henry Morgan, with three personally selected trustees leading five mules, each groaning under a heavy crate of gold. Somewhere along the trail, the buccaneer, the mules, and the men disappeared. We imagine that there was some excavation and history tells us that there were three shots ringing out, followed by the startled, wild-eared appearance of five packless mules stampeding wildly through the underbrush. We know also that Henry Morgan showed up looking well satisfied with himself.

Arriving on the beach at the Atlantic side he professed his ignorance as to the whereabouts of any gold and told his henchmen that the reward per man amounted to about fifty dollars. His men were not the grumbling kind—they were out-and-out belly-achers. And they knew all about the crude abdominal operations calculated to relieve this belly-aching. Nor were they concerned with sterilizing their instruments first ! You know what I mean—and so did Henry.

That night when the tropic moon was hidden behind the scudding clouds heralding the coming storm, he capped the crowning episodes of his colourful career by surreptitiously organizing the most trusted adherents of his crew, loading them and what loot he hadn't cached aboard the three most seaworthy vessels of his flotilla, cutting loose his other ships and standing out to sea, the great pirate sails billowing in the trade as the vessels sluiced through the blue, blue Caribbean back to old Port Royal, leaving the rest of his band marooned to die of fever, starvation, and thirstation (the word is mine) on the desolate shores of the Chagres.

Of course, Port Royal was not the only pirates' stronghold in the Caribbean. The leaders and men in the trade did not put all their yeggs in one casket or throw all their loot to the easy-virtue ladies. The whole Caribbean is dotted with tiny uncharted islands and tortuous stretches of beach along the mainland whose lagoons and hidden harbours are ideal to hide treasure. Seventeenth-century free-booters were not unlike those of to-day. Enough was enough, after all. Many of the sailors had wives, families and sweethearts back in the old country and they were ever on the alert to find some forsaken inlet garlanded with vegetation and overrun with chattering hordes of monkeys, snakes and tigers—all calculated to withstand the encroachments of man—where they could park their booty and chart its location, hoping against hope that they might live to one day come back, pick it up, quit the racket and return to the sweetest little woman in John O'Groats.

But, just as is the case with the underworld characters to-day, so the pirate dealt harshly with any who tried to go straight. The result was that sooner or later most of them lay kicking on the deck with their lungs pitifully gasping for breath from a throat that had been cut from ear to ear. Many's the sun-kissed cay or stretch of silver beach laved by the threshing sea, where moulder to-day the boxes and chests of these men who hid and charted their treasure but never lived to pick it up.

Back in 1925, a gang of us spent one pay-day night in the seaport of Cortes, Honduras, horsing around with the babes and drinking warm Scotch and soda. We were leaning against the bar rolling dice for the next round when a simple-minded Carib Indian came padding up in his fish-reeking garments, to announce in bad Spanish that he was buying all the *Yanquis* a drink. He meant it in good faith, so, despite his bare feet and their alarming proportions, we humoured the man, although none of us would have given more than fifty centavos Mexican money for all his worldly possessions. His eyes were bright and his speech a trifle thick, so we naturally figured that he had peddled his last mess

of fish to advantage and been hitting the white eye ever since.

"Why don't you run along like a good guy and peddle your snook . . . ?"

"And don't try to tell us you haven't been fishing," laughed another. "You're mackerel to the eyebrows—and not fresh mackerel either !"

"*Pescado !*" the Carib cried. "Yes. Fish ! At dawn to-day I go fishing over at the islands—and *mire !*" He drove great spatulate hands down into the depths of his pockets and came up with an assortment of dog-eared lottery tickets, fishing tackle—and a tinkling gush of gold. The music those coins made as he flung them on the counter ! Green with age and exposure, but they rang truer than any wedding bells. English guineas ! Doubloons ! Golden Louis !

That *was* a night. Shamelessly we let him buy. Shamelessly we bought for him. And we huddled over him so completely that the rest of the little world drifted by in its own alcoholic fog oblivious to the tremendously exciting fact that here was a poor black fisherman who had unwittingly tapped some age-old cache of the pirates, and who once more had put sixteenth-century gold to its old accustomed uses ; namely—the purchase of wine in quantity !

"Lissen, Olivas, you old pal of my childhood days," never mind which of us inebriates first got that way—during the course of that purple passage we all had our arms around his sturdy shoulders at one time or another—"don' get too drunk. Drunk. *Savez que es drunk ? Boracho.* Now don' get sore. Your money's all right. Jus' don' get too *boracho*. Looks like good fishing out where you were, *no es verdad ?*" This accompanied by a leer and the tinkling of one of his golden coins !

"*Quien sabe ?*" was all we could get out of him. Who knows, indeed ? Primitive as he was and befuddled by drink in the society of whites as he was, the secret remained his. What the hell did he care about the shades of Henry Morgan and the profound contribution to the science of numismatics

that he had already been a party to, and which he could contribute to immeasurably more if we could only sober him up and journey over to his secret island with him? How could we expect this illiterate aborigine to get steamed up over the fact that some centuries ago this same Caribbean Sea which we could hear and smell beyond the portals of the Pan-American Bar had been alive with cut-throats salting down the very booty which he had stumbled across as his fishing net explored the desolate coral caves? What was it to him that his underwater groping for shell fish had brought to light the key to a possible fortune of gold and jewels that might make him king of all he surveyed? *Dios!* He was king of all he surveyed anyway just then (*hic!*), and Olivas was a strict adherent to the philosophy of living for the moment.

In the cold, grey dawn after parking the sodden Carib body in our rooms for what remained of the night we, our hangovers, and our guest, timorously arose, had our coffee and proceeded to the beach. Olivas and his tummy had both turned sour. He and his stomach objected to putting out to sea, but the objections were overruled. He sulked all the way across the choppy open waters of the Bay of Honduras, seeming to take personal satisfaction in getting himself and us as sea-sick as possible. To my certain knowledge he spent at least three hours under the broiling noonday sun operating his sail by a string attached to his great toe while he busied himself cleaning fish under our eyes and noses. Greener by far than the slimy water that sloshed in the bottom of his dugout were we when the bay island of Roatan finally stood out against the horizon.

The black bastard disappeared as soon as we came alongside the jetty at Coxen Hole. Perhaps he thought that the island's lonely beaches and majestic coco-nut palms were all we required to put us to rights with our God. *His* God called for a liberal application of white eye. Yet, ironically enough, during our enforced incarceration on that tiny little island we found that the inhabitants were white, inbred, English speaking all (this despite the fact that the island is a possession of the Republic



of Honduras, a Spanish speaking country) and that the names were such as Jones, McNab, Cooper and Morgan. They told us that there was a settlement there known as Jonesville which consisted of islanders who had continually intermarried in their own little group since the first Jones had thrown up his shack against the tropic trade.

But we were more interested in Morgan and before we left Roatan we had discovered that the pirates had indeed hidden away on Roatan. They had left more than their names and their progeny too. Guns, eroded cannon balls, grapeshot, fortifications, empty gin bottles (of the old school) all indicated that the island had been a mid-sea stronghold of the buccaneers, undoubtedly serving them on their long expeditions between Jamaica and Panama.

We never did find the particular island where Olivas discovered his gold. So far as I know, while this is written, the poor benighted soul is still drunk. I am afraid he got some bad ideas that night in the Pan-American bar !

I have always been intrigued by the idea of discovering hidden sources of pirate treasure the way Olivas did. There must be something intensely personal and satisfactory about diving for conch shells in twelve feet of the sweetest, clearest water ever made and seeing gold pieces glistening in the coral reef. That's my idea of pure adventure. Done on a commercial basis, however, there can be no question that the sensible way to go about the thing is to make a study of the known sources of sunken treasure and then seek to bring it to the surface by scientific means. The incontrovertible evidence of treasure lying fallow at old Port Royal, for instance, would warrant anybody with the spirit and the means to go after it with diving bells and other up-to-the-minute paraphernalia.

There is the case also of that fortune of three million five hundred thousand dollars in Australian gold dust and nuggets which went down with the British frigate *Madagascar* in July 1853, off the eastern coast of South America. She had cleared from Port Philip, Australia, for London with this

sweet treasure in her hold, while above decks were booked the most desperate characters on the island.

She never came to port and was never seen again by human eye. Years passed before a woman racked with yellow fever managed to gasp out from her deathbed the true story of the tragedy of that ship. In halting phrases she recounted how the desperadoes had mutinied when the ship was off the coast of Brazil, how they had killed the Captain and his officers, herded the passengers and crew down in the hold, how they had picked out a few of the prettiest girls, loaded them and the gold in the lifeboats, and then put the ship to flames. They thought of everything—everything but the stern hand of God. For they had no sooner abandoned the pyre than a sudden monsoon whipped up the sea. Desperately they drove the tiny boats toward the lavender shore-line. But white caps became mountains and all but one boat capsized, sprinkling the sea floor with gold. Only eleven souls landed—and of these all but three were destroyed by fever and exposure. The two surviving men forced the lone woman to share their furtive lives, abandoning her in Rio only when their gold was gone, and she so desperately sick that they deserted her, confident that she would die with their terrible secret.

The gold still lies in those tropical shallows, a challenge to the most intrepid treasure hunters of to-day. And there are plenty who qualify. Within the past few years a group incorporated in England, raised approximately one hundred thousand pounds, and under the title, 'Treasure Recovery Limited,' proceeded to Cocos Island in the Bay of Panama to search for buried gold. Another group has feverishly struggled to lift one hundred thousand dollars in gold and silver bullion from the barnacle-encrusted hull of the American Mail liner *Colombia*, submerged off Point Tosca, lower California. Also twenty-five *tons* of wedge-shaped gold and ingots from the Inca country is being tracked down by means of a pirate map which has all the earmarks of authenticity. Or consider the American liner *Central America* which had successfully weathered the stormy Cape Horn on her return

voyage from the California gold-fields, only to encounter a terrific hurricane when she was within a scant ten days of New York. Four hundred persons drowned and those who lived to tell the tale reported fantastic stories of carpet bags, money belts, and hidden pouches which had miraculously appeared on deck when all hands were called to man the lifeboats. Gold became a drug on the market when it was a question of fighting for life in that heavy sea. Metal was strewn about the decks and scuppers of the liner like sand in an infant's play-box. And the contents of her massive safes still lie in the Purser's office, now strangely quiet since the propellers have decades ago ceased to whirl, ship's bells to ring and passengers to complain about the dining-room service.

Back in 1830 the British frigate *Thetis* crashed at Cape Frio, off Rio, submerging with eight hundred thousand dollars in gold and silver. All but one hundred thousand dollars was salvaged within a year—but the remains of that fortune still lie in thirty fathoms of lime-tinted water unbelievably clear, challenging modern treasure-seekers with their pneumatic drills, coffer-dams, compressors, dynamite, and electric torches to 'come and get it.'

Davy Jones's locker is peopled with the ghosts of drowned seamen sitting about, sipping their salty highballs and munching seaweed pretzels as they conjure up the happy days they could enjoy on earth if only they had reached Snug Harbour with their gold. The crew of the galleon *Todos Santos* still talks of the hundreds of tons of silver and gold which went down when they were attacked and scuttled back in the seventeenth century. The skipper of the Spanish frigate *San Pedro* points a shaking finger to Camana Bay and wants to know why his ship with one million two hundred thousand dollars has never been raised from her shallow grave. What can the men from the German Kosmos liner *Sakkarah* say to that—their hull lies off the shores of Huamblin Island, one hundred miles south of Chile, deeply, deeply weighted down by the enormous bulk of four million dollars in bullion—gold for the barnacles to play with?

Let them talk. The day is coming—and coming soon—when the treasury of the deeps will have to open the coffers to the insistent demands of science and courage. The rewards will be great to those who first master the secret of the sea. These gold deposits are drawing real interest—and that interest is rising every day !

## *Along Spanish Main Street To-day*

AS far as skippers of vessels plying the Caribbean are concerned, there is every reason why the Captain should hate the sea! It is a curious phenomenon but a fact nevertheless that passengers either sink into a slough of loneliness, nostalgia, and sea-sickness or else indulge in an orgy of drinking, dancing, deck sports, and gregariousness. Those in the latter classification make up their groups, pester hell out of the rest of the passenger list, but still have a bang-up time. But those under the shadow of forsakenness and the fear of the great open spaces do queer things. The veneer of their accustomed social life, the polish of their Rotary meetings, and the assurance of their jobs and bank balances slips away even as a gull wheeling off with the wind. We might assume that Captains are paid to maintain discipline and see to the proper navigation of their vessels, but the fact remains that their owners expect them to arrange games, entertain in their cabins and at their tables in the dining saloon, push fat dowagers around the dance floor, kiss babies, play bridge with the dubs who cannot make up a foursome for themselves, and even to murmur words of consolation to love-hungry spinsters on the loose.

As though the Captain did not have enough to put up with, the owners of the line practically always determine who will be his table mates. As a rule, these are women—wives of transportation officials, daughters of company Vice-Presidents, deadhead passengers from Washington. Practically all are there to receive—not to put out; this goes for the absorption of free drinks, special culinary treats, amusements, and favours.

Once in a while the Captain blows up. One such case

comes vividly to mind: Sirocco Sam, they called him—a burly six-footer with eyes that cold blue of the North Atlantic and shaggy eyebrows bent heavily over a powerful, weather-beaten face. A voice like a fog-horn had Sam—and a vocabulary like an old school cavalry mule-skinner. As a society man Sirocco Sam was a first magnitude blank. But, oddly enough, there was something so utterly masculine about him that he attracted the women like flies are drawn to liquid honey in a burnished blue bowl. The first time I heard him pop off I was a passenger on his vessel and we were just entering the harbour at Puerto Limon, Costa Rica. Sam was a stickler for promptness. He was due at the breakwater at 8 a.m. and the native pilot was supposed to be there to board his ship and take him to the pier ready to load bananas by 9. There must have been a hundred of us aboard, 75 per cent of whom were feminine, and 60 per cent of those school teachers or profoundly pious ladies interested in missionary work, prohibition, the banishment of dice, and the uplift of the human race. All of us were hanging on to the rail eager for our first view of the harbour and the port, and, of course, curious to see how the pilot would negotiate the dangling Jacob's Ladder in that choppy sea. At 8.15 the skipper snatched up his megaphone and bellowed for the anchor. Almost at once the chain grated through the hawse and the great spoon plunked into the sea. At 8.30 a faint put-put-put was heard from the shore and out of the placid harbour and into the rough open water popped a tiny launch with the pilot. He was dressed like an *opera-bouffe* diplomat and he stood in solitary majesty lest his uniform be wrinkled. By 8.40 the launch was alongside the stern and was proceeding in a graceful arc toward the waiting Jacob's Ladder. Expectantly we hung over the rail as the motorman deftly brought his little peanut shell alongside, flicked off the power, and seized a gaff with which to catch the rope and hold the launch while his lord and master clambered aloft.

He missed.

At once he leaped back into the cockpit, started the motor, and drummed off in a wide circle to try again. Meanwhile the

pilot removed his gold-crusted hat and bowed deeply to the Captain, his bald pate gleaming in the sunlight.

Some of us turned our heads apprehensively above for the Captain's reaction.

"Jesus!" was all Sirocco Sam had to say—and that quite audibly and quite disgustedly.

The second time around the manoeuvre was repeated. Again the gaff failed to catch the ladder and it was now 9 a.m. Once more the cap was removed and the bald pate dipped in obeisance.

"Harrumph!" That much issued through the megaphone held in Sam's twitching fingers. It was vastly more significant than his first remark.

Again the tiny launch swept around and approached the ladder. We were three deep at the rail now, with women and children first.

The boatman missed the ladder. This time the removal of the hat and the deep ceremonious bow was accompanied with a deferential click of the heels.

It was beautiful to behold the way all control left the Captain. He became primitive, simple, unaffected, and was himself at last—a true salt with no more of a feeling of responsibility for his lady charges than the Commander of the U.S.S. *Lexington* on a Pacific tactical expedition.

"Lissen, you bald-headed bastard," he screamed through the megaphone as the pilot and his craft swept past the prow, "if you'll heave the anchor off that tub of bilge of yours, I'll bring *my* ship alongside!"

We're not through with Sirocco Sam just yet. There came a time when he rose to even sublimer heights. It was some years later when his ship was tied to the jetty, again at Puerto Limon. It was five in the evening and he was scheduled to depart. Aboard were some forty-eight single girls from the Western Union Telegraph Company on a special cruise, as well as the usual complement of ordinary passengers, mostly women (as customary). Within the battened hatches had been stowed some fifty thousand precious stems of luscious green bananas. The skipper wanted to get those bananas out of his

steamer and into the hands of the jobbers up North as soon as humanly possible. His passengers were all aboard—there was no reason why the Port Superintendent should not give him the highball.

Enter the Port Superintendent—a nervous individual, perspiring freely and obviously with a message.

“Gimme ten minutes, will you, Skipper? There are fifteen hundred bags of coffee due in the yard any minute and I’ve promised the Freight Department to stow them in the after deck. It won’t take any time.”

The passengers all listened intently for the response.

“Give you ten minutes.”

The ten minutes passed. Sirocco Sam snatched up his megaphone and charged to the rail.

“Cast off aft!”

Scarcely had the reverberations of this booming command died away than the Port Superintendent hopped out of his office like a scared rabbit.

“The coffee’s here. The coffee’s rolling out to the pier right now. Just a couple of minutes—please!”

“Give you two more minutes!”

Two minutes passed. Sirocco Sam, now apoplectic of countenance with megaphone gripped in quivering hands, hung over the bridge and delivered the following oration:

“Cast off aft . . .”

“But, Captain . . .”

“Cast off aft, I say . . .”

“But, Captain—where shall I put the coffee?”

“Cast off forward!” The megaphone slowly swung around to the pleading Port Superintendent as might a beam from a distant lighthouse. “I said cast off forward and I said cast off aft. And I say to you, you unhappy sonovabitch, you know where you can put that coffee—not bag by bag but bean by BEAN!”

Now I am not a modest soul in the matter of using strong language, but in all sincerity to my readers I must admit that I have not done full justice to the rich vocabulary that Sirocco Sam employed in that particular instance. What he actually



said was so jarring that four elderly females retired to their cabins and did not appear until the ship touched at Havana—and then they disembarked only to lay in a fresh supply of smelling-salts.

Well, coffee is like that and who amongst us can blame the Captain. It *might* have been a cargo of pineapples, you know. . . .

There was the time when two of us wangled a week's leave of absence and made a deal with a Carib boatman to take us from Tela, Honduras, over to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. We lay around the rickety waterfront hotel for four days, planning to return to our jobs aboard one of the Company steamers that was warping into her berth at the dock even as we sipped our drinks and mopped our brows. We had spent Lord knows how many nickels trying to demonstrate that the slot machine *could* pay and counting upon an eventual jackpot to square us for the purchase of too many drinks for the blowsy females who drifted in and out of the establishment. It was around eleven o'clock at night when we felt that the time had come for us to push off and board the steamer. We were both dressed within an inch of our lives; Tom in a blue sports coat and white flannels, with white buckskin shoes and a Panama hat, and I in a light grey flannel suit, with the usual trimmings. The bill had been paid and we were broke. That was all right, though, because we had our tickets and there was plenty of credit for us when we got back home. As we started out we heard the premonitory drumming of rain-drops on the tin roof overhead, and as we opened the door our nostrils were assailed by the pungent odour of night rain. That was one thing we had overlooked—the fact that the rainy season was due. It was almost as though some Celestial hand was turning on the shower spigot little by little. First came the big but scarce drops which were absorbed at once into the dust. Then they came smaller but faster. We ducked into the nearest saloon as the very heavens opened up and a sustained flood of water fell as effortlessly as though it were being poured from a giant water-sprinkler. There was a

mighty whisper from the jungle, a few hundred yards beyond—then a rushing thresh of rain flaying down on leaves, tin roofs, and the parched ground underfoot. The air blasted in cold and damp, surcharged with moisture, while the steady downpour hammered across the railway right-of-way kicking up countless spurts of dust as it did so. Swifter and swifter came the deluge—the dry road became a mass of puddles, and the rain fell in sheets, drowning out all other sounds including voices, phonographs, and shuffling feet.

“Hell of a fix we’re in!”

Automatically we started to strip, wrapping our shirts around our outer clothing in the hope that we might be able to make a dash for the ship and get aboard without ruining them. Meanwhile the girls in the *cantina* gathered about, screaming with excitement, shrilly commenting on our physical characteristics, even slapping at our white skin. I looked bad enough in nothing but a pair of white underpants, but my companion unfortunately had a suit of striped underwear—and he looked like holy hell!

We raced bare-footed through the blinding rain, down the track, past the Customs house, and on to the dock. Not until we had passed the prow of the ship did we realize what we were in for. Then, unexpectedly, as we reached the gangway, we noticed that the promenade deck was brilliant with Japanese lanterns and that an orchestra had appeared from nowhere and was playing sweet music to the fashionably dressed couples dancing at the invitation of the skipper.

Somebody saw us. There was a burst of laughter, followed by the patter of high heels to the rail, and looking up we were painfully aware of the fact that the entire party was hanging over the side of the ship in amusement and amazement as we clambered up the gang-plank with as much dignity as we could muster under the circumstances.

There was no backing out. The ship was scheduled to leave in a few minutes and we had been seen anyway. But what we had not counted on was the reception that was accorded to us as we dripped our way miserably into the foyer on the promenade deck, *en route* to our state-room below.

The Captain ! A dour individual in spotless whites whose face was eloquent of the unspoken opinions in his heart. The rest of the crowd was disposed to see the fun in an innocent escapade, but the Captain laid an egg of no mean proportions in his log-book that night !

At that, his experience was no worse than that of another Captain who had the misfortune of carrying me north on a vacation from Honduras. To start with, my friends had corralled all the talent that the town offered. Prostitutes, tenors, piccolo players, card-sharps, and *politicos*—all had been invited to come aboard and drink as much as possible prior to the departure of the ship—all to be charged to me, of course. Not content with that, my chums arranged for me to proceed out on the pier and aboard ship on the hurricane deck of the most recalcitrant riding mule in the community. This animal had an antipathy toward water such as no hill-billy ever had. But what chance had he with the flaying hands of twenty men cracking his rump and urging him forward ? Well, he laid his ears back and trotted out on that quarter-mile pier without a whimper. More than that, he was induced, forcibly perhaps, to essay the crew's gang-plank on the rear of the ship. Delicately he picked his way up that slanting board over the water and aboard ship.

The Captain was broad-minded, thank God. He responded to the spirit of the occasion by directing the bell-boy to proceed throughout the ship with his melodious gong arousing all the passengers and directing them to repair to the bar for an evening of free amusement and free drinking (I paid for the latter). It was late at night—perhaps two or three in the morning—but the long-suffering tourists groped their way after, arrayed in night-gowns, dressing-gowns, pyjamas, and what not. Meanwhile the local talent was going strong and such favourites as *Mi Viejo Amor*, *Cielito Lindo*, and *La Cucaracha* were being blasted forth with everything that the boys and girls could produce.

Fun was fun and a good time was had by all. But when the Captain discovered my disconsolate mule gravely poking about the after deck as he was about to cast off, the complexion

of the party assumed a different hue. They had to swing the poor critter off in a sling and I have not heard the end of that party yet !

It was during the prohibition years that the technique of importing good Scotch into New Orleans and New York achieved its highest artistic level. Ordinarily on shipboard during that period it was customary for the passengers to 'pool' their liquid resources the last night before arriving in port, convening in some congenial person's state-room and depositing whatever liquor might be left out of their stock in a common container. And when I say 'common'—I mean just that. Usually it was a galvanized iron tub and if the Chief Steward was of a mind he would toss in a couple of tin dippers and a few pieces of lemon, thus giving the effect of the labourers' drinking pail as seen along construction highways in the early days. Practically all contributions would be whisky, gin or rum. These three mixed together, if not exactly palatable, still constitute a beverage that can be assimilated and held down long enough to go into the bloodstream. Invariably, however, some poor benighted soul (usually feminine) would appear with one of the following : either a complete quart of that horrible after-dinner drink with the gold flakes in it (God only knows what the base may be—but an exhaustive chemical research convinces me that the flakes are discarded pieces of tinsel paper saved by youngsters with grubby hands, squeezed into balls and eventually sold for just this purpose) or one of those large bottles with the four stoppers and the four inner containers each with a different brand of suicidal syrup—namely, our old friends, crème de menthe, apricot brandy, kummel and cherry bounce ! What the addition of these vitriolic chemicals could do to our otherwise benign punch-bowl is recorded on many's the Captain's log book.

'At 11 p.m. in state-room 42 on the c deck a riot was precipitated . . . Passengers were revived by the liberal application of fire hose.'

Some of the cagey tropical people discovered a way to introduce a few bottles of good Scotch by various means. The school of the pregnant wife was perhaps the most popular. It is a low Customs inspector indeed who would lay his hands or the inquisitive eye on the protuberant bulges of an obviously pregnant woman. He could tell by the unhappy expression that the poor soul was great with child and suffering much. She *was* suffering much at that because she had plastered about her middle next to her skin, and held by liberal quantities of adhesive tape, anywhere from eight to twelve hip flask-shaped bottles. After donning her clothes it would sometimes be a matter of several hours before the ship would pass Quarantine and be received. Meanwhile the poor soul would suffer the torments of the seven years' itch and when she finally tottered miserably down the gang-plank, clanking like a belfry in the high wind, no inspector would fail to pass her at once.

There was a steward, too, who achieved a transient fame in New York (and incidentally built up a substantial bank balance) by smuggling a basketful of liquor ashore each voyage. Here is how he worked it out: after all the passengers had been cleared and the hue and cry had died away he would proceed nonchalantly down the crew's gang-plank and start for the pier head with a large covered basket on his arm. At the entrance he would be immediately accosted by the guard. "Whaddya got in that basket, bub?"

"I'm on my way to the A.S.P.C.A.," the steward would reply with dignity.

"Da basket—I'm not askin' yuh about de A.S.P.C.A. Whaddyuh got in that basket? Come on, open up!"

"Officer, within this basket I have the ship's cat. She is ailing with a rare disease and I'm . . ." The indignant minion of the Customs would then snatch at the basket in exasperation, wrench off the cover and out would leap a rangy grey tabby who would immediately kite back on the ship. Thereafter it was simple. The steward would simply turn with a reproachful shrug, return to the ship, load his basket to the gunwales with assorted liquors and proceed majestically by the law! The only mistake he made was in his assumption

that Customs officers were so plentiful in New York City that it would be a matter of years before the same guard would be assigned to the same pier the day he happened to arrive. That's where he made his big mistake !

Caribbean Captains are not only inflicted with the village drunks. Their cross is not restricted to the love-sick spinster and the loud-mouthed Lion from Louisville. They frequently have on their hands the unhappy job of wet-nursing and bringing North such assorted zoological specimens as whip-tailed iguanas, pacas, tepis-quintlzs, agoutis, fruit crows, coatis mundi, sloths, kinkajous, capyharas, whole-faced ringtailed monkeys, alligators—and of course the inevitable parrots with their inevitable psittacosis (bird language for athlete's foot). And turtles ! Let's start with the turtles. These are bred commercially and shipped North from Galapagos, Panama, Colombia, Jamaica and particularly Costa Rica. They weigh up to five hundred pounds on the hoof and their value is chiefly for the gelatinous substance underneath their top shell which furnishes the basis for green turtle soup at approximately fifty cents per inhalation. Prior to shipping, these turtles are kept in submerged corrals fenced in along the fresh water estuaries. Here they bask and dive and woo. Here the females lay their eggs, which are the colour and size of a billiard cue ball but which are unlike eggs as we know them because there is no lime in the outer membrane. The damn things feel like rubber balls and they are so tough that one can actually bounce them. They are considered a delicacy by the natives and are usually sucked raw.

When these turtles have arrived at the age of adolescence, native boys in loin cloths dive in to the soupy water and engage them in battle. Of course, there is hell to pay and the indignant turtle rises to the surface and lays about himself with his powerful armoured flukes. This is where he makes his big mistake. He is promptly roped and hauled out by a pulley, dumped ingloriously into a waiting dugout, and in company with a dozen other members of the tribe, all kicking

and puffing, he is taken out to ship-side and run aboard in a sling.

This is where the Captain's headache really begins. Just as he is responsible for the green fresh delivery of his banana cargo on arrival, so also is he expected to deliver these turtles 'in the pink.' They are usually kept on the forward well deck in individual baths. These are big wooden boxes which must be kept constantly filled with water. I say constantly because the turtles spend practically all their waking hours petulantly slapping the water out of their boxes.

As if this added responsibility were not enough, the Captain also finds himself beset by importunate passengers who want turtles brought up on the promenade deck so that their children may ride them !

Although Department of the Interior and immigration authorities, ship owners, pursers, and governmental officials in all tropical countries talk themselves blue in the face about restrictions, passengers will persist in buying and bringing North zoological specimens from the jungle. Flaming macaws squawk and night monkeys chatter in their wooden cages on the after deck. Boxed reptiles and scurvy denizens of the backwoods make life unendurable in north-bound cabins. And well they might, because they have no more chance of getting by Ellis Island than a Chinese leper. Tears, bribes, cajoleries alike fail to move the stony-hearted Customs people, who are more concerned with the non-introduction of malignant beetles, caterpillars and diseases than with potential additions to the zoological gardens of Baton Rouge. And so the poor old Captain has to carry them all the way back again—a never-ending succession of steamship days and nights filled with the discordant jungle and barn-yard squawks of these poor unfortunates. . . .

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' immortalized the sailor's attitude and superstition with regard to birds. You will recall that his hoary old salt killed an albatross which had alighted on his ship, with results even more dire than a first flight case of delirium tremens. Birds are *persona*

*grata* aboard ship. They may roost on the taffrail, the radio antennæ or the crow's nest in perfect security. Once on a ship between Haiti and Colombia a booby bird drifted over from the great rookery at Cay Verde (one of the Bahamas) and was snatched by a landlubber as he alighted on the rail. Now birds have little expression in their faces: of course, they can register fear or anger—but not the subtler nuances. Can you imagine a crow looking complacent, passionate or self-satisfied? Well, this booby bird was an exception; he had the most reproachful expression on his face ever seen on any fowl. He knew that it was his prerogative to alight on the ship rail if he so desired. He knew that it was his privilege to commit a nuisance or lay an egg in the scuppers if Nature so inclined him—and this without molestation. So when the gross Mr. Altobelli (big banana and grape fruit king from Sioux City—and travelling on a pass, mind you) laid hands on the sacrosanct body, the booby bird promptly ejected the contents of his stomach. This consisted of assorted sea-food, garnished with grape fruit rinds, and it was obvious that the bird felt much better afterwards. His mind was clear for one thing—and his eye brighter. He craned his long white neck around and sized up his captor and then let him have four or five rabbit punches.

"The bastard bit me!" complained Mr. Altobelli as he turned loose the bird.

We all cheered. Meanwhile the bird had the devil's own time getting back on the rail and pushing off. He had a brown body with a white breast and was about the size of a Northern seagull but with a much larger wing spread. This one screamed imprecations at us and we were visited with the foulest sort of weather from that time until we arrived at Cartagena. It is pleasant to be able to report that Mr. Altobelli gave up a much wider assortment of comestibles as a result of his unwarranted tampering with the booby than did the bird.

Regurgitation is a common and not unwholesome occurrence on the high seas. Many sea birds vomit the partially digested contents of their stomachs—some in self-



defence and others, as in the case of the frigate bird, to act as bait. These frigates (variously known as bosun, man-o'-war or poison birds) drift along over the sea until they spot a submerged school of fish. Over this spot they do their stuff and as the victims rise to the surface the frigate swoops down and snatches up his prey. In the spring time when the man-o'-war is too lazy to forage his own victuals he will hang suspended in the still tropic air on his giant wings, waiting for a booby bird to snatch up a fish, and then he will languidly extend himself and chase the booby until the latter drops his prize—whereupon the frigate snatches a meal on the fly for himself.

Long honoured as a symbol of the sea, the gull is probably regarded in as high favour by landlubbers as any sea bird. In the role of marine scavenger he is a worthy character and it is illegal to kill gulls anywhere in the United States except in a few of the nearly waterless states of the South-west. Surely if sea travellers and ocean-side vacationists were to organize themselves into a society the gull would inevitably become the symbol of their order. Nobody who has ever taken to the sea can fail to thrill to the wheeling gulls as they scream across the ship's prow, diving and rising in a never-ending exhibition of superb aeronautics. The gull is forever blended in our memory with the sights, sounds and smells of salt water. And when we head down to the Southern Cross the gull goes with us.

I asked Sirocco Sam once how far a gull would follow a ship.

"Depends on how liberal the steward is with the garbage," was his succinct reply.

"But how many days out?" I persisted.

"They'll follow us clean across the Caribbean if they want to. They scavenge by day and rest at night—either on the ocean or on the ship."

Accurately speaking, gulls do not fly with a ship: they glide above it. I noticed that they kept stations day after day about thirty feet above the navigating bridge. It seems that there must be an up-draught air current that carries them along



One's for the baby—  
the other is mummy's  
—both are appliquéd  
in gay colours by the  
San Blas Indians of  
Panama—usually on  
Minnesota flour-bags.  
Oh yes ! they're ladies'  
blouses.









Patient, skilful hands weave intricate patterns on these Guatemalan looms.

over moving vessels. For surely there must be some explanation of the fact that they move ahead for a quarter hour at a stretch with scarcely the quiver of a pinion, their only departure from a perfect military posture (shoulders back, arms straight, little fingers along the seams of the pants) being the constant head movement as they peer fore and aft, port to starboard, lest they overlook anything.

Even in the teeth of a gale the gull manages to move forward with a minimum of wing motion. They glide and beat to windward just as a sail boat does, sliding along at astonishing speeds and 'laying close-hauled' at angles that would gratify the skipper of a racing yacht.

They're gluttons—make no mistake about that. Heave a herring over the side if you don't believe it. After the first toss the air will be filled with flailing white wings and screaming imprecations as the gulls backwater and hang suspended, waiting for the next offering. The little black boys who infest tropical waters and beg for coins exhibit the identical traits. Only in the latter instance you seldom see anything more acrobatic than a simple dive from the jetty as your boat pulls in, whereas in the former case it is no uncommon spectacle for a gull to perform a complete somersault in the air in order to execute a quick change of direction. Gulls will take shell-fish far aloft and drop them on rocky ledges to crack their shells. They will swallow and digest whole fish as long and heavy as themselves—and if they are not heckled unduly by their mates they will accomplish this feat of gluttony in ten minutes.

Gulls and dolphins are probably the sailors' dearest friends. Legend ascribes to them both the ability and instinct to guide ships away from hurricane centres. Dolphins, sailors believe, will keep drowning men afloat and propel them gently to the nearest shore by bumping them along on their blunt rubbery noses. Tropical waters are alive with such as these, so have no hesitation in booking passage—and fear not the hurricane.

## *Six Empire Builders*

'TENNESSEE' AND MAJOR BURKE

THE master of ceremonies who paraded before my mind's eye some of the men of stature who had made tropical history in the past was one Major Burke.

To get to Major Burke we must first consider Tennessee—a tropical railway man ('hoghead') of that nickname. Tennessee was the master of his craft and the pride of the road when his wiry legs were astraddle the rocking catwalk of a lumbering freight car. He could dodge overhanging banana leaves in the dark by instinct. He knew every inch of the many tropical railways by heart and was never known to have been caught off balance. I knew him well and frequently used to visit him in the light frame building that faced the Caribbean in Tela, Honduras, where he lived with the other railway men. He had a natural capacity for making friends; a loose, amiable mouth, crinkled crow's feet at the corners of his eyes, a warm Southern drawl and a heart as big as all outdoors. It was only when pay-day came around and the cold touch of ivory was in his palm that he lost his grip. Then the loose, amiable mouth was drawn across his colourless face like a taut guitar string; his warm, twinkling eyes were hard as flint—and his voice came from an aural cavity that might have been lined with granite.

Seven hundred dollars were hanging in the balance on the green baize table that famous night I shouldered my way into the hoghead game.

"Wham!" Tennessee's voice and the dice exploded simultaneously. There came a five.

"Fever! Get hot . . . come outa th' desert!" It was

a prayer and an imprecation at once. The dice flew against the board. A placid four showed up on one, the other spun eerily on an apex, seemingly for an eternity. "Snake eye!" begged Tennessee. The spots flashed, the die tipped, rocked, and came to rest—a smooth white surface with its lone Cyclopean eye for all the world to see.

History may never recall another such instance, but in the space of the next ten or fifteen minutes, amidst a suspense that was wellnigh unendurable, Tennessee made nine straight passes with the dice—at no time shortening his bet—on each pass offering any part of the money on the table.

Only one man faced him at the end—Dan Brooks—not a railway man at all, but a professional gambler and the owner of the American Hotel at San Pedro Sula.

"All I've got left says you can't make the tenth pass, son." Brooks assembled one of those mutely tragic pots—big bills, neatly folded in obscure, cunningly hidden pockets in the lining of his hat—small bills, badly crumpled—a couple of gold pocket coins, Mexican and American, a white gold watch, a lighter. . . .

Tennessee made a generous estimate of the value of this pot, covered it accordingly, and turned loose a sweaty nine—then a four, an eight, box cars twice—then a six-three.

"The hotel against your pile!" snapped Brooks.

After all, who ever heard of eleven straight passes?

Now I was standing behind Brooks and facing Tennessee. And behind the railway man beamed the cherubic mug of McBoyle, Chief Dispatcher of the line, who was so elated to see one of his hogheads taking the pro to Nellie's house that he was ecstatically shaking hands with himself as a gesture of hope, for me to see.

I nodded to him, raised my hands in a similar shake and grinned from ear to ear.

"Suits me," said Tennessee in a hard voice.

I was horrified. He had often told me what confidence he had in my judgment on business matters (he used to bring me his money to invest for him) and evidently took my smile and handshake as a tip to him to cover the bet. Instantly he swept



his great pile of damp bills, watches and assorted bric-à-brac on to the board.

"Shoot!" hoarsely ordered Brooks. "We'll settle afterwards." He was in fever heat lest Tennessee would back down. There was more money on that board than the hotel was worth, anyway.

The bones hopped, turned, rebounded. Tennessee's fingers clicked like a pair of castanets. The pass was clean and legitimate—and the spots read six-ace!

That's how Tennessee won the American Hotel at San Pedro Sula and that's why (on a due bill basis, you might say, because he insisted that it was my nod of encouragement that gave him the courage to shoot the works) I visited him.

I rode over from my farm, together with the cook, who insisted that she had a vacation due her and who knew the trail (besides, the overseer was tired of her). We swung on to our animals, rode to the river, unsaddled and packed everything into two native dugouts. The mules were glad of the chance to get in the cool, muddy water, swimming and puffing along to the lee of our tiny and precarious craft so that the wash wouldn't get in their great, fuzzy ears. We kept our fingers crossed and our revolvers cocked all the way over, in case the alligators might be hungry. But the mules didn't know that.

After two sizzling days in the saddle (we strung our hammocks in the smoky confines of the most convenient nipa huts we came to—sharing quarters with great families of peons, children, pigs, chickens, and dogs—all underfed) we hit San Pedro. When Maria was suitably located in the native quarter, I proceeded to the American Hotel. A real dining-room! People who wore coats! A bar—and a bartender in a white monkey jacket! And a *patio*! The place was seething with humanity: prospectors, gamblers, and travelling salesmen.

And a place where a man could get a cheque cashed at last! That was only because Tennessee went to bat.

"Latin America is a great place to sign your name on a piece of paper for a drink or a dinner or a bottle—or for

anything you want—provided you're known. But don't try to get a cheque cashed! It can't be done." Such was his admonition as he handed me twenty dollars.

"If there's one thing the Latin respects, admires, and expects from the Northern visitor, it's his cash. If you have a pocket full of bills and silver you can't go wrong. The little boys who run alongside and scream 'Money, Charlie!' are quick to respond to the ring of your coins. The man behind the bar beams as he changes your bill. The girl in the 'House of All Nations' thanks you prettily as she shoves your two one-dollar bills into her sleazy stocking. You can buy chickens and eggs, whisky and corn as you travel through the interior provided you have the cash. But your cheque or draft, or word means nothing. Get it on the line in Latin America!"

Rarely is a traveller robbed, Tennessee told me. He can climb into his hammock, or roll up in his blanket, or collapse upon his cot in regions far beyond the rim of civilization, and yet the contents of his pocket will not be violated. But be he ever so rich, let him try to pass a cheque or suggest that a bill be rendered for later payment, and his rest in that hammock, that blanket, or that cot will be fraught with the greatest hazard.

"You'll like old Major Burke," Tennessee assured me, over a clinking glass of Scotch-and-soda (real ice—my first in months). "He's regular. And he's got a trunk full of clippings and dope connected with the Old Timers in Central America. You know—the guys who took chances (I had to laugh). Those who weren't afraid to get mussed up. Guys like Guy Molony, Lee Christmas—you know. You're interested in that junk, so I'm going to bunk you with the old man. Besides, that's the only vacant bed in the joint!"

Sure, but was it all right with the Major?

Oh, yes, it was quite all right. I found that out as soon as Tennessee introduced us. A charming, silver-headed old gentleman he was, bent over his papers, rummaging and mumbling through enormous leather trunks full of memoirs, cracking gnarled knuckles as he re-lived his early days in the tropics.

Our room faced on the *patio* (euphemism for a glorified

barnyard beaten smooth by the bare feet of a legion of servants, scratched anew every day by a myriad of chicken claws, inundated every morning by the contents of many a chamber from rooms along the balcony such as ours—in short, a courtyard reminiscent of the pig pen and relieved only by the delicate framework of magnolia and bougainvillea which somehow managed to grow in spite of it all—or perhaps because of it all) and the brilliant noonday sun streamed across our beds and touched up the old gentleman's ascetic face as though a spotlight had been thrown on him. A spotlight *had* been thrown on him at that ; I vaguely recall having heard that he was the one mixed up in the million dollar Louisiana lottery scandal many years ago, and that he had fled the country, never to return (although it was posthumously developed that he had been a victim of circumstance in the entire affair). Through his eyes, and supplemented by his documents and brittle yellow clippings, I was taken back as far as the days when the gold rush was making Nicaragua front-page news, and there paraded before my fascinated imagination an array of tropical renegades, crusaders, and pioneers that were truly giants in the earth. We young ones in the tropics, who thought we were tough, were rolling commencement hoops on the Wellesley campus compared to the exploits of Burke and his contemporaries ! Listen :

#### WILLIAM WALKER

"... Why, William Walker was no bigger'n a game cock, but he whipped 'em all in Nicaragua and was the first and only North American to become President of one of these Central American countries. Sometimes his army was no more'n fifty men. But he had brains and courage—and leadership. Shucks, son, jungles were nothin' to that *hombre*. You boys to-day hack through—he *wiggled* through."

By piecing together these ancient clippings of Major Burke's, many of which antedated the Civil War, I learned that Walker was born in Nashville, Tennessee, 8 May 1824,

and that he was graduated from the University of Nashville and later the University of Pennsylvania, where he received his M.D. degree in 1843. Walker must have been a highly intelligent man. He travelled extensively in Europe, studying medicine, and later, finding that profession distasteful, he took up law and was admitted to the bar in New Orleans. This early history indicates that he was restless and dissatisfied, despite his obvious talents, because he then turned to journalism and in 1848 became one of the editors and proprietors of the New Orleans *Daily Crescent*.

"Before Walker came to Central America," the old man ruminated as he leaned back from his trunk with a sigh, and crossed his sensitive blue-veined hands in a gesture of repose, "his journalism took him out of the south and into California. Adventurous blood stirred in his veins, suh, and the General could always be counted upon to respond. Politics, law, and duels were his meat—and the more of the latter, the better."

"Where did he first get this crazy idea of coming down to Central America to take it by storm?" The question was mechanical, as I was vastly more interested in sorting and sifting my way through the treasures in his trunk, which he had given me permission to do, than in listening to the biography of someone now but a memory.

"Let's see . . ." Burke settled himself back more comfortably in the chair, putting one congress gaiter cautiously on top of the other across the foot of the bed. "It must have been in '53 or '54 that Walker colonized the Mexican states of Sonora and lower California. Without the sanction of the Mexican Government, too, mind you." The old man slapped his thin haunch and crowed with laughter. "There was a man for you. He simply sailed into La Paz with his party and promptly proclaimed California an independent Republic and himself President! That was his first taste of dictatorship and it might have worked if only the federal authorities in San Francisco had left him alone." Burke produced panatelas and lighted them with studied Southern politesse. "But they acted on representations made by the Mexican authorities and blocked his food supply, thus forcing him to surrender to an

American military expedition. He got out of it, though, was acquitted on a charge of violating the neutrality laws, and the first thing anybody knew he had accepted an invitation from a Nicaraguan revolutionist to whip an expedition of soldiers-of-fortune into shape and join in the fighting. They made him Commander-in-Chief and Walker and his men put it over !” How the old gentleman’s pale eyes glistened as he reviewed these days of his early youth !

Yes. The clippings were before me. They had been carefully cut out of papers and dated in purple ink. It was impossible to tell what papers they were, but there was one dated 18 May 1856 announcing that the United States recognized the new Nicaraguan regiment whose Commander-in-Chief was none other than William Walker. Then there was one dated July of that year which announced that Walker had inaugurated himself President of the Republic ! Then came a bundle of clippings quoting Walker’s policy of uniting the Central American Republics into a military empire, of building an inter-oceanic canal and of reintroducing an African slavery into his country in order to develop agriculture. And finally, announcements of the United States recognizing his Presidency.

Is it true that Walker’s dream contemplated the eventual annexation of the United States ? Or did his megalomania go that far ? Who knows ?

“ That is a question that no historian has ever been able to answer.” Major Burke chose his words with meticulous care as he lovingly examined the ash of his cigar. “ I know how he must have felt having such statements imputed to him.” The old, faded blue eyes gazed at me sadly from beneath silver brows. “ I too was the victim of vicious but unfounded rumours that caused me to be banished from my native land.”

“ But it wasn’t impossible that he had such a wild dream in mind, was it ? ” I put the question hurriedly, having detected a quaver of emotion in the old gent’s voice.

“ After all, Napoleon had ideas equally mad which he pretty nearly realized. And Walker did go a long way before he got his, didn’t he ? ”

The conversation having been steered to safer channels, we chatted then at length about Walker's astonishing campaigns—his courage, his military strategy, his personal leadership. Major Burke pointed out how the man's delicate physical stature in no way interfered with his domination over the most extraordinary band of cut-throats ever assembled under one tattered flag. He pointed out, too, how Walker's early training in medicine, law, and politics served him so well in the field. There were many stories of the man's personal attention to his wounded; how he dressed their machete cuts, lanced their festering sores, medicated them for their fluxes and fevers. And, of course, how his legal background served him in dealing with the intriguing *políticos* of Nicaragua in those hectic days.

Walker's dream of an inter-oceanic canal was what led to his undoing. He took the weaker side in a struggle between two groups of capitalists in New York for the control of that rich transit company which was using the inland waterways of Nicaragua to move parties from the Atlantic seaboard to the gold-fields of California without sailing around Cape Horn. Yes, when he seized the Accessory Transit Company's ships and properties in Nicaragua and turned them over to the favourite side, he opposed no less a power than Cornelius Vanderbilt. Agitation in foreign countries was stirred up against him, powerful influences moved in upon him from every quarter. But Walker was too agile for them all.

"It was only when General Walker accepted sanctuary on a foreign battleship so that he could better protect the straggling but loyal men in his service that he made a mistake." Burke slowly removed his feet from the bed, deliberately tapped the ash on the floor, and leaned forward with his hands on his knees. "Walker knew men. He seldom made a mistake. Money was the only thing he didn't know—and Vanderbilt had plenty. The character he thought he could read in the faces of the men to whom he trusted his life could not stand the strain of money. It was money, not men, that double-crossed him. Money comes in right handy once in a while." He rose to his feet and walked uncertainly to the

door. "I guess I ought to know. I handled enough of it in my day." He lifted his arm and pointed a shaking finger across the *patio* and across the great valley I had just traversed. "Down just about where I'm pointing you'll find his grave to-day, right by the wall of old Trujillo, Honduras, where they stood him up and shot him down."

I came and stood beside him. How the afternoon had flown on his winged words. It was twilight and the sordid sun-baked *patio* of a few hours ago now lay before us tinged with the miracle of a tropical dusk. Soft shadows had obliterated the sharp, harsh lines of midday. Gone was the livestock, gone the sounds of the working day. Miraculously all that came to our ears was the melodious, soft laughter of native women, guitars softly plucked, the distant tinkle of ice in glasses: miraculously all that came to our nostrils was the heady evanescent perfume of the jasmine tree.

### LEE CHRISTMAS

Lee Christmas, born in Livingston parish, Louisiana, in 1862, was firing banana trains out of New Orleans on the old Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railway when he was nineteen. Burke knew him, of course. But that was after Lee arrived in Central America. He made it his business to know everybody who came to Honduras from Louisiana. He had to.

Christmas came to Honduras all right after he had demonstrated that he couldn't tell a red signal light from a green one.

"Mebbe he couldn't tell red from green," Major Burke mused at the dinner table that evening, "but he certainly had plenty of chances to try, because many greenbacks and much blood flowed across his horoscope." We soused our paper-thin steaks with ketchup into which Burke gravely dunked his French fried potatoes before he continued:

"Yep, Lee was given an eye test up north, failed completely, and since he knew his railway days were over in the States he did the next best thing. He flagged the first banana

boat he could put his foot on. Colour-blindness, a thirst, a wife, and two children represented his capital. All he brought down here was the thirst and the bad eyes." I passed the old gentleman the fried plantains, not to mention the steamed rice, okra, and red bean paste (with onions). There was nothing the matter with his appetite. "I was right here in San Pedro when Lee got his first break. He was railway engineer on the banana line between Puerto Cortes and Pimienta, about a seventy-kilometre haul. There were two Bonillas fighting for the Presidency of the Republic at that time—Policarpo and Pedro."

"Related?"

"No. That's a common name down here—a great name. Policarpo was the President—Pedro the Revolutionist. The Government had taken a strong position along that banana railway and it was up to Manuel to dislodge the enemy. He liked Lee's looks. There was something forceful and arrogant about the man—the way he carried his head—his utter indifference to arms, machetes, or pistols. He made a deal with the engineer to carry his troops through from the interior to Puerto Cortes, in exchange for which he agreed to give him a commission in his army. Lee was a man of few words; when the agreement was reached he climbed into the cab, took his highball from the brakeman dangling from the caboose, and he was off. He may have been colour-blind, but that did not prevent him from seeing the hastily erected barricade that Policarpo's men had thrown across the track. But Lee was used to bouncing livestock off the right-of-way with his pilot and he sized this obstruction up as one that he could plough through. He did. Of course, the underbrush on both sides was bristling with the Federals who raked the train with gunfire. In the midst of it Lee kept one hand on the Johnston bar and with his free hand whipped a revolver from the holster of the nearest soldier and calmly picked off one Federal after another. It was a clean sweep and Pedro Padilla appointed him a full-fledged Colonel in the Revolutionary army."

Everybody seemed to know Lee—or something about him.



After dinner was over and we were taking our coffee and brandy in the *patio*, one after another of the Old Timers drifted over to listen to Major Burke hold forth on this, his favourite subject. How many times these others had heard of the exploits of Lee Christmas I do not know, but they were new to me—new, incredible, and utterly fascinating. My bar bill amounted to telephone numbers that night before the last word had been spoken, but I have never regretted the investment.

"If there was anything old Lee liked better than wheeling a train over the high iron, it was to fight from a moving locomotive. His success as a soldier-of-fortune was built around that simple fact. Why, I was with Pedro the day Lee Christmas told me that so long as the Revolutionists could hold the railway and draw the enemy into fighting range along the right-of-way they would win any war."

"And did they?"

"I'll say."

"Did they!"

"Don Pedro made him *General de Brigada*, didn't he?"

"Yes—and he should have." A fragrant panatela glowed in Burke's ascetic fingers. There was a gleam in the old eyes as he spun his familiar yarn. "First thing he did was bottle up five of the six locomotives at the far end of the line. Then he fired up the sixth, rigged up a fortress on wheels, flat cars with thick sand-bag walls—and he and Don Pedro together picked out the crack shots of the army. Up and down the road they flagged—guerrilla warfare on wheels—picking off the enemy and so demoralizing the Federals that the President's army dwindled away, deserted and returned to corn fields all along these mountain-sides. Policarpo was captured and Pedro was inaugurated as President, his first official act being to confirm the appointment of Lee Christmas as Brigadier-General in supreme command of the military forces of Honduras!"

"Made him Chief of Police too, Major," drawled a voice in the darkness. "Don't forget that. Boy! I was in Teguci-

galpa at the time and, believe me, those were the days of the *gringo*. We had the run of the place. Hotel lobbies, *cantinas*, any gal in the district—or out of it—the sky was the limit!”

Burke nodded curtly. “That’s true, George. I was in the capital at the time myself. Lee helped me secure silver mine concessions, as you may recall. I had dinner with him in the capital one evening at that time and I remember a little rat-faced native who delivered a message before we were through: something about inspecting a batch of new recruits before they were assigned to border duty at dawn of the following day. The General was in full uniform and carried his Mauser on his hip. Lucky he did too, because it was a frame and he was attacked by seven knife men in an alley. One threw a knife that pierced his hat. The Mauser brought him down and the others lost their nerve. It wasn’t all smooth sailing for Lee at that time, even though the rest of us were basking in his reflected glory.”

Conversation in the moon-flooded *patio* became animated. All these men knew something about Lee and all were eager to recount his exploits. It seems that Christmas wasn’t much of a hand as peace-time dictator and Police Chief. A residential palace of his own and the adoration of a never-ending succession of black-haired, brilliant-eyed Spanish beauties was not enough to keep his blood stream at the proper temperature. From Venezuela came the word that President Castro could use a combined railway engineer and soldier-of-fortune to organize the government forces against revolution. This was Lee’s meat. He accepted a commission as General in Castro’s army. This was what the foes of Pedro Padilla were waiting for. They cracked down from the Nicaraguan frontier, ousted Padilla, and when Christmas hastened back and rallied his old guard the enemy put him to rout and forced his tattered army into the mountains.

Eventually Christmas was captured and thrown into the same dungeon to which he had previously consigned Policarpo. There came that morning when the blood-red sun streamed down through the palmetto trees and angled past the bars into his cell as the deposed dictator was led forth

to meet his firing squad. He spurned the black kerchief, commenting in his forceful Spanish that such a filthy rag should never be tied around his eyes.

"Where do you want your body shipped?" the Captain asked derisively.

"I don't want it shipped anywhere," General Christmas snarled. "I don't want it buried—I want it to remain on top of the ground, so that the buzzards can eat me and then scatter my remains over every one of you!"

Then came a moving picture rescue headed by his able right-hand man, Jerry Murphy, who had miraculously recruited a handful of Don Pedro's most faithful who were willing to dare all for their fiery General.

"I remember back in 1910," commented a voice, "when Pedro Padilla sent an emissary across the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans to buy rifles and Gatling guns to blaze another trail to Tegucigalpa and the Presidency. He gave him ten thousand pesos in gold and that's the last he saw of the money. Took him nearly a year to amass enough to try again, and if it hadn't been for our old friend, the banana, he wouldn't have gotten a penny."

"What's that got to do with Lee Christmas?" I turned to the speaker. "What's the story behind it—do you know?"

"Do I know? Everybody knows—everybody who has lived down here, I mean. Simple too. The music goes like this: New York bankers had been negotiating with Honduras to finance the country and liquidate the loan through Customs duties over which an agent of the bankers should have control. That meant high import duties, prohibitive taxes and all that. Naturally, the banana companies were all against this, and inasmuch as the treaties were on the desk of the President—Miguel Dávila, I believe his name was—the obvious thing to do was to get him out and somebody else in. Pedro Padilla was willing to play ball and Lee Christmas was there to execute any commission his Chief might ask him to do. Jerry Murphy was Lee's right-hand man—so the three of them met the banana boys in New Orleans where they laid their

pipe lines." I could see his hands raised in the darkness in a prophetic gesture.

"The United States Government had Secret Service men watching this gang because it did not want any Central American revolutions just then. There was a Secret Service man stationed outside the brothel that night, but at two o'clock in the morning he got disgusted, went to a telephone booth and called his Chief: 'It's nothing but a drunken party in the district,' he reported in a loud voice all those inside could hear. He hung up and went home.

" 'Well, *compadre*,' Lee Christmas then said to Pedro Padilla, 'this here's the first time I've ever heard tell of anybody going direct from a whore house to a White House. Let's be on our way! ' "

Conversation was bandied back and forth along these lines for the best part of an hour. Out of the exchange of reminiscence—and remember all by men who had rubbed elbows with Lee and adventured with him—I learned that the desperate mission was successful and that Tegucigalpa, the capital, fell without a battle, and only four members of Congress voted to ratify the treaty that Miguel Dávila had signed just before he grabbed his rusty Panama from the peg and took to the tall timber. Once more General Lee Christmas enjoyed the luxury of a palace and found time to give full vent to his taste in dark women and strong liquor. What finally broke the old warrior's heart was not the dissipation and not the arduous fever-ridden expeditions as General in the armies of five Latin American Republics (Honduras, Nicaragua, Salvador, Guatemala, Venezuela) nor his instrumentality and personal danger engendered by placing five Presidents in office through revolution. No, his decline dated from the day he reported to Washington, obtained a personal interview with President Wilson and volunteered his services for the A.E.F. The President recommended that Christmas be given a commission and it looked as though he might cap an adventurous, if illegitimate, military career in a burst of glory with all the trimmings that his country could bestow upon a faithful fighter. But just as the doctors had tested him and

found him wanting years ago as a railway engineer, so now they thumped his fifty-five-year-old barrel chest, peered into his bleary eyes, discovered that his blood stream was rampant with jungle fever and that his body was liberally peppered with bullets, one of which was lodged an inch from his heart !

Christmas insisted that he was physically fit as any officer in the army and to prove it was willing to fight any man in Washington forty-five years or over.

The doctors shook their heads and Lee stumbled down the hospital steps with his shaggy head lowered in humiliation. His fighting days were over and that meant his living days were over. He died in New Orleans on his way back to Honduras to stage just one more battle—more for old time's sake than for anything he could get out of it.

"Lee was a great one with his free champagne and credit at the roulette wheel," Major Burke mused as we climbed into our cots. "He was the last of the great tropical soldiers-of-fortune. You'll never see his likes again." He sighed gently. After all, there was nothing he could do about it. Nor I. We both fell asleep.

#### MINOR C. KEITH

There was one giant in the tropical earth known by reputation to us all, but in the flesh by none of the people who frequented Tennessee's bar at the American Hotel. That didn't prevent us from having very definite opinions though and it was noteworthy that all of us held one common opinion of this man—that he was truly a great pioneer and truly a great character.

He was born about 1850 in Brooklyn, clerked for a time in a Manhattan haberdashery, and in his early twenties was raising cattle and pigs in Texas. In 1871 he went by cattle ship to Puerto Limon, Costa Rica, invited there by his uncle, Henry Meiggs, who had acquired quite a reputation building railways in South America and who had been commissioned by the government of Costa Rica to construct one from

Puerto Limon, the Atlantic seaport of that republic, up the mountains toward San José, the capital in the mile-high Cordilleras.

His name was Minor C. Keith.

The railway as conceived by Henry Meiggs was actually resolved by Minor Keith. It took him twenty years to build a hundred miles and it is said that there is a dead labourer represented by every tie laid down on the first twenty-five miles of that track. There is poetic licence, of course, in such a statement, but we do know that upward of six thousand men laid down their lives during the construction of that span of steel, including Minor Keith's three brothers.

When young Keith stood at the forward rail of the cattle ship as her rusty spoon plunked down into the jadeite waters of Limon Bay, just inside Grape Cay, his nostrils quivered with the early morning bouquet of the tropical jungle instead of the customary odour of fertilizer. Looking shoreward, he beheld the black sand and rock that were as foreboding and as forsaken at that time as they had been three hundred and eighty years earlier, when the Great Navigator himself had first beheld the rugged mountain wall that he took perforce in the name of the King of Spain and which he called Costa Rica—the rich coast.

Labour was Keith's first problem—and it was destined to be his last. Financing was important, to be sure, but he knew how to go about that. Yes, money and disease Keith could combat—drought and the torrential tropical rains he could combat—politics, intrigue and graft he could combat. Labour was one thing he could not beget himself and so he did precisely what William Walker had done before him; namely, advertise.

'Wanted—ten or fifteen young men to go a short distance out of the city. Single men preferred. Passage paid.' Such was the type of copy Keith inserted in the New Orleans press. A short distance out of the city, indeed! Little did that first load of seven hundred thieves and murderers from Jefferson Parish realize what was in store for them as they took passage and sailed down the Mississippi through that fan-shaped,

mud-coloured Delta whose demarcation of coffee turned to the purest azure as sharply as the white stripe defines the right and left sides of a modern Metropolitan boulevard—little did they realize as their faces turned south to the Spanish Main that they were in for an experience in hardship and privation, the like of which they had never dreamed about before. But they began to get the idea south-bound. The result was that they mutinied. Keith and a score of foremen, however, were prepared, and put down the mutiny with revolvers and machetes, and the legend remains that of those seven hundred who reluctantly went to work on the first miles of that projected railway fewer than twenty-five survived!

Keith realized that the breed from the gutters of the Southern states was not what he needed. He tried Jamaican negroes next and they did better. But there again the fever and the drink took them off like flies, and those hardy souls who could stand the gaff were lured on down to Panama by the high wages and superior living conditions offered by De Lesseps, French contractor who was at that time excavating the original Panama Canal.

Keith then imported two thousand Italians, who were so horrified by the conditions that confronted them in that miasmatic lowland jungle along the Reventazon River that they fled into the jungle, where sixty of them died like rats before the rest decided to return.

Lascar, Portuguese, Spaniard, Negro and American—Aztec, Toltec, and the descendants of the ancient Mayan constituted his pay-roll. Pay-roll? Why, for periods of nine months at a time those men slaved on that right-of-way without a cent of pay, held only by the magnetism of Minor Keith's personality and his promise to take care of his men.

Long before his railway was finished, Keith had put himself and Costa Rica so deeply in debt that the only way out was to make the railway pay. It was apparent that passenger traffic between Limon, Turrialba, Heredia, and San José could not possibly turn the trick. So Keith decided to plant bananas. In 1873 he began planting them in the jungles back of Limon and along the river, and within ten years he had three companies

shipping five million stems of fruit a year. Is it any wonder that bananas and not mankind became the privileged clients of this road? And then his social relationship with Costa Rica became firmly cemented: he asked for and was given the hand of Cristina, daughter of the Republic's President José Maria Castro.

Keith undoubtedly had dreams of an international railway connecting the three Americas—North, Central, and South. He was so definitely dedicated to the impractical idea that he involved himself in a debt of honour exceeding a million five hundred thousand dollars, and took upon his broad shoulders the responsibility of a huge debit pay-roll and even set up an individual pension plan whereby every living employee, labourer, and executive alike, who played a part in the construction of that heroic hundred-mile railway was promised a pension for the rest of his life.

Before Keith finally died at the age of eighty-one (on 14 June 1929) his affairs were so arranged that the promise he made of pensions for all those on his pay-roll became a matter of fact. It is said that this pension system still exists and that it has been lived up to precisely as the man promised. This is a splendid example of his character, because it is comparatively easy to stand in a jungle in the middle of the day with the sweat dripping in your eyes and your khaki clothing sticking to you and make wild promises; and it is a matter of self-preservation to make wild or extravagant promises to a motley crew of cut-throats gathered around with their machetes and their axes and their pistols—and their unpaid obligations. Moreover, there was some quality in Keith's serene blue eyes and apple cheeks that made men believe in him. The admirable and extraordinary fact remains that this faith was always justified. God knows, the American tropics bristle with examples of men with beatific expressions who readily promise everything but who never deliver.

*'Wanted—a few more men of Minor C. Keith's stamp to go to work in the American tropics. Name your own salary—if you fill the specifications, you're worth it!'*



## JOSÉ DE LA CRUZ MENDOZA AND 'TENNESSEE'

Old man Burke pointed out José de la Cruz Mendoza one morning shortly after I met him as we were strolling along the dock at Puerto Cortes to visit the incoming ship and get the latest papers.

"See that *hombre* with the puttees and the ten-gallon hat?" he asked me, as a little petrol motor-car put-putted past us on the railway tracks. "Well, that's Mendoza—Comandante de Armas here and heir presumptive to the throne."

I had seen Mendoza from time to time and had been impressed by the man's arrogant carriage and the peculiar fact that here was one pock-marked Indian whose facial scars seemed to be lost, such was the expression of absolute cruelty which dominated his features. I had heard that his technique was to take 'traitors' (any poor soul who professed to follow the political leadership of any party other than Mendoza's was a traitor) out on the beach at the point of his Derringer, order them to dig graves just beyond the reach of the sea and then shoot them into their appointed excavations. He always carried a stiff leather quirt, tipped with silver, which he manipulated with a dextrous, lightning-quick wrist motion calculated to draw blood on a peon's face or back at each touch.

I mention the case of Mendoza here because he is the type that any traveller visiting the Caribbean may expect to see scrambling up a Jacob's Ladder from a pilot boat, or strutting up a companion-way to receive a ship when she is alongside a tropical pier. He is the type of man who will come into the first-class dining-saloon, sit down and order breakfast with his hat on, and who will thereafter repair to the smoking-room and order drinks (for which he has no intention of paying) unmindful of the fact that he may be holding up ship operations, shore leave, the passengers' time—simply to demonstrate that he is the Big Push.

"What's his background? Where'd he come from? Where is he going?"

Major Burke drew contemplatively on his panatela.

"The stock is pure Indian—give the devil his due there. You can see it in his liquid black eyes and in the straight blue-black hair. You can see it in those high cheek-bones too. I remember when José was a barefoot kid. Chances are he's illegitimate—not that that matters—and he spent his childhood on a small parcel of cleared land back in the banana country. His father was shot in a revolution and his mother ran away with another man. That left José master of the property which, much to his astonishment, turned out to be quite valuable as banana land. Having a couple of thousand dollars in cash in his pocket naturally made him feel that there must be a lot of more easy money to be picked up in the valley. He organized a group of squatters who went in and claimed land, much of which they were able to sell, and gradually he made himself such a nuisance that he had to be bought off. Ever since he has been a thorn in the side of agriculture, gradually surrounding himself with enough backing and money to get the job he now holds."

"Is he sitting pretty now? Big salary, plenty of perquisites and authority and all that sort of thing?"

"The salary is only a couple of hundred dollars a month, but he picks up plenty on the side. Take that ship there. She's scheduled to load twenty-five thousand bunches of bananas Saturday night and Sunday morning. Now he's not supposed to have his office open on Sunday, so the shippers will either have to meet him more than half-way to get his signature on the clearance papers, or else a highly perishable cargo worth a hundred thousand dollars will lie in the holds until Monday."

"Can't pressure be brought to bear at the capital to have a man like that removed?"

The Major shook his head dubiously. "No," he mused, as he flicked his ash into the sea, "he knows too much. Furthermore, he is too active fomenting discontent for the constituted Government to take a chance. Some patriot might conceivably be designated to shoot him in the back some night, but there's one sure thing—as long as he's alive they won't take any chances with him."

"That sounds like an intolerable situation," I said. "What do you think the eventual outcome will be?"

"In a month or so he will strike, take the port, seize the Custom House and the revenue, then march on to other coastal ports and threaten the Government. If he wins, he may become President, unless he chooses to set up some figure-head who will take his orders. If he loses, he will be shot. Simple, isn't it?"

The Major's words were a revelation. Ever since that conversation I have studied the swarthy officials at the various Caribbean ports with more than passing interest. Travellers are prone to consider these people as comic opera characters or perhaps to regard them with contempt or amusement. Don't let their surface arrogance, their mannerisms and apparent lack of education blind you to their potentialities. The Comandante of a port is a force to be reckoned with. Live down there long enough to see how these men conduct themselves out of hours and you will know what I mean. I remember one who got a flaskful of absinthe inside himself one pay-day night and then stormed the private club where twelve white men were sitting around a big table, rolling dice and having drinks, and at the point of his gun he abused them individually and collectively for the better part of an hour. He finally and deliberately walked around the table, picked up each drink as he came to it and flung the contents into the face of the man who had ordered it. None of the white men was armed and none cared to die. He got away with it too—that night. Two weeks later, in an unguarded moment, he decided to go swimming in the surf where three of these white men happened to be bathing at the time. They say the undertow got the poor fellow!

Oh, yes, poor old Tennessee finally came straggling back to the railway. He lost his precious hotel one night over the roulette wheel. It seems some banana planter who had just sold out his properties for a large chunk of ready money came over to San Pedro, and after enjoying the proprietor's hospitality at the bar proceeded to exhibit his roll until the poor

old railway man could not withstand the temptation any longer. Then came the inevitable. Tennessee banked his own game and the banana herder hit him twelve times in a row, five hundred dollars a lick, on black.

Lady Luck was responsible for the rise and fall of many of these giants in the tropical earth—all of them, in fact. And on the books of certain ones she inscribed her name in a flowing purple Spencerian hand, while on others she scrawled her name in red—and I don't mean ink !



BOOK FOUR

# Candid Cameradventures



## Havana Hot Spots—Spool One

### I

THERE was a picture of Havana as we approached—but the darkness was too far advanced. At five in the evening the island was flat, olive-coloured against the infinite blue of the sea and the pale, pale blue of sky and the fleecy whiteness of the silly little cloud puffs. The twilight was so adumbrated against the metal of the sea: only the movement of the gulls and the distant vista of shimmering sails in the sunset gave the scene animation. Then the Malecon emerged—and with it, that perfect sweep of *palazzios*, spires, and domes—so spotless, so pure in the luminous tropic night.

We cursed our luck that there was no picture here for us.

. . . But wait:

You say 'Hi Li,' but it's written Jai Alai. Take plenty of money when you go. It is Cuba's most painless method of extracting the tourists' millions. Huge auditoriums called 'Frontons' attest to the popularity of this ancient Basque game. Jai Alai is certainly as important to the Latins as baseball to the North Americans. Everything from the acoustics down through the histrionics has been worked out with painstaking skill. How nobly ring the voices of the bookmakers, what thrills titillate the tourist's spine as the baskets swish through the air and the little ball cracks against the granite wall with terrific impact, how heart-touching when a player prostrates himself and flails the floor with his basket in an agony of defeat.

Taking moving pictures of this game provided an excellent opportunity of learning something about its finer points.

Jai Alai is served in two forms, *partidos* and *quinielas*. The



*partido* is a doubles match and usually consists of thirty-five points. There are two callow youths in blue shirts and two equally pasty ones in white. The tourist is invited to bet on one of the two colours. Either one. It doesn't matter a particle. For the bookies cannot accept a wager unless they can find someone in the audience to take the other end. All they get out of it is a straight ten per cent cut from the winning tickets.

Now the game is about to start. One of the boys in blue has the ball. He jazzes it around in his wicker scoop for a second, bounces it once or twice appraisingly, then, his back to the serving wall, he abruptly scoops it up in the long basket strapped on his hand, whirls, projects it against the distant wall with all the force of his elongated arm. The impact is crisp as new money. Back it comes, only to be stopped handily by white who reaches for it recklessly and sends it back in a sure, swift backhand gesture, infinitely graceful. Blue advances and takes it on the ricochet, succeeding in returning it only by prostrating himself flat on the court. This brings an involuntary, ecstatic whoop from the body tourist up in the box seats which unnerves white who thereupon fumbles. Score one for blue.

Whoops! Blue's ahead. We bet on blue fellers. Not bad pickers for little old Omaha, eh fellers? Guess we know our High Life what?

In the orderly processes of time the battle wages back and forth, five and five, ten and ten, even twenty-five and twenty-five, the game growing in pace and sound effects with every *tanto*, or point, until finally the tourist is worked up into a froth, a frenzy, and his blood, hot enough under normal conditions of Bacardi and lime, now bubbles like a sulphur bath.

Blue wins the next point. One of the players in white grovels on the court and howls dismally up his basket.

Yah says Omaha.

Nine to ten on white inkles a bookie in a red beret.

Whazzat? Nine to ten on *white*? Taken.

White wins the next point.

But blue comes back and takes the next. Twenty-seven to twenty-six now.

Yah-hoo observes Omaha.

Eight to nine on white screams the exasperated bookie. Sold friend. Sold.

Blue wins again. Six to ten offers the obliging bookie smoothly. Sure. Fair enough. We're getting gypped a little fellers but it's only house percentage. The more bets these fellers make the more cut they get.

Again blue crashes through. One or two? Okay, Near enough.

White is on the point of exhaustion. Poor old *blanco*. All in. Blue is pert as a sand-piper on the beach and has twenty-nine *tantos* to the opponent's twenty-six. Only six points to go. The *touristas* are happily lapping up Daiquiris out of frosted parfait glasses. Chubby, honest Omaha fists are crammed with slips of paper. Whoop! If the chaps in good old Consistory twenty-seven could only see us now!

Blue runs off the next point and the next. All resistance is gone. The gates are lowered and the grand charge forthwith gets under way. Betting madly, the boys see white run it up to thirty-three while blue stabs one solitary *tanto*, and that a fluke.

Bets are even again. Just a bad break fellers. Of course it's nothing to the house fellers. They collect ten per cent regardless. They should worry. This is on the level. Blue still looks good. Even money for the honour of South Omaha, hey fellers?

Sure.

And white runs out the string.

But boys, boys, did you notice that every time there were any odds suggested, you were given the long shot and those slickers down in the cheap seats snapped up the short end? Tssk tssk.

*Quinielas* is different. Now you'll like *quinielas*. Six lads, each in a different coloured shirt, play singles competitively. Blue plays green. If he wins he gets one credit. *Amarillo* clashes with *lila* and whoever wins that rally gets a point. So

it goes, each one meeting the other, eliminating and conquering until one of the colours shall have gained six points. He wins, and if you have your money on him you stand to harvest an important scoopful of *pesetas*.

No chance to cover bets after this game starts. All betting is booked before the game begins. Absolutely on the level. Yes. But what chance has Omaha of recognizing the local Columbia Lou? To Nebraska, one star and five hams look exactly like six basket-handled Jai Alai players or maybe four Hawaiians. He must pick blindly—Pastrana of the blue shirt or Emilio of the yellow, Guillermo of the lilac or Epifanio of the claret . . .

So he socks away his money on a sweet Barcelona ham while little bright eyes from Havana's tenderloin sits down front and shrewdly picks the star.

It's lots of fun to watch the Jai Alai. Be sure to see it. Fun to watch the straw hats in the gallery move with the swift trajectory of the ball. Fun to cheer like hell for the other side, hoping to lure the bookies into offering you a fluke bet. Fun to bet too. Great odds, and ab-so-lutely on the up and up. Be sure to take in the Jai Alai, you Shriners. They cater to Shriners at the Fronton. They're waiting for you right now! I'll say they are.

Getting all this action and sound on film turned out to be quite an enterprise. But we got the picture. *Click*.

## 2

In common with mad dogs and Englishmen I rounded up my moving picture technicians, chartered a big open Packard, set the camera up in the tonneau and started through Havana's sun-glazed streets at two o'clock in the afternoon. I thought we might pick up some interesting shots at this time because not a soul was in sight. I was wrong.

Out in the Vedado region, Havana's smart residential section, we spotted the palatial establishment of the Minister of Public Relations. It was completely fenced in and the formal gardens were alive with beautiful pink flamingos. No

one would respond to our insistent ringing so we were perforce obliged to shoot the picture of those birds over the wall.

Pandemonium ! No sooner did we train the camera on the gardens and start cranking than soldiers leaped out at us from saloons, back doors and motor cars. We were ignominiously taken in custody and conducted under motor-cycle escort with all sirens blasting, down to the village jail.

They thought it was a machine gun ! *Click.*

## 3

Jiggs and Maggie's is a waterfront dive designed to seduce the tourist on his way back from Sloppy Joe's to the ship. Could we take some pictures there ?

By all means—especially if we took our time, interested a lot of people and patronized the bar.

We expected a Babylonian floor show but we were disappointed. There were half a dozen brown-skin gals, inadequately dressed, who did a collective belly dance while a little dwarf dressed like a Spanish *hidalgo* dived at one after another of these palpitating brown tummies. He was so small that in each case all the girl had to do was spread her legs apart and he would dive through, landing on his nose. It was all very educational. *Click.*

## 4

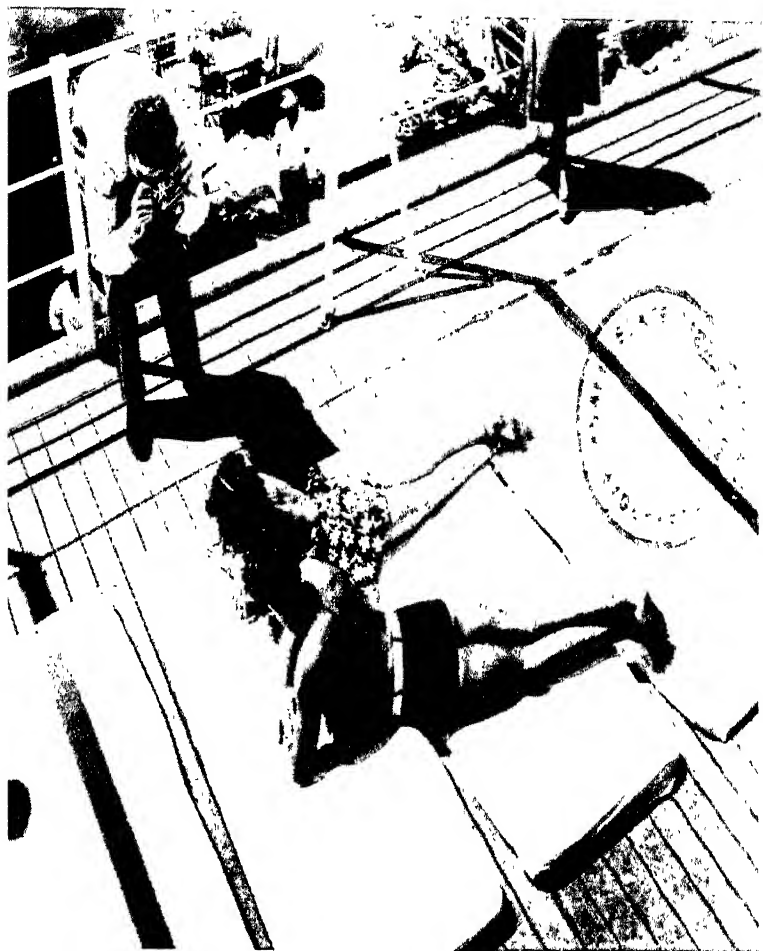
We weren't ready to go to bed, so we subsidized a dark-complexioned gentleman to conduct us to a place where we could see the Yanyegos. They were the same ones who did their voodoo stuff for the Texas Centennial Exposition. The men are very tall and very black and the women petite and coffee-coloured. They dance, sing and pantomime the voodoo religious rituals, gradually working themselves and their clients up to an emotional ecstasy. Grass, feathers and animal skins brilliantly dyed constitute their costumes. Drums and

maracas play a vital part in their presentation. The high spot was an act in which the men pursued the women, eventually throwing them down on the floor and going through the motions of shoeing them. Later on we learned that this number was called 'Shoeing the Wild Mules.' I inquired cautiously whether the word 'mule' was a pun on the type of shoes they wore or whether it was the real McCoy. It was. *Click.*

## 5

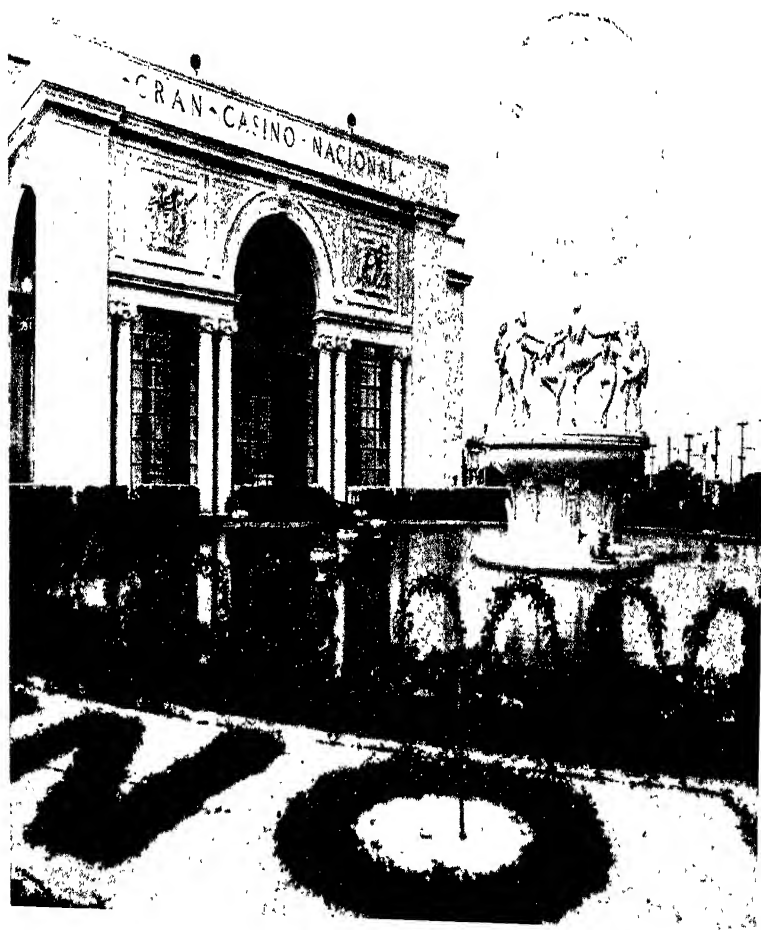
We still weren't ready to go to bed. Dawn had not yet thrown its pale fingers across the dark Cuban night. We decided to visit a Chinese dance hall. It was in the heart of Havana's Chinatown that we finally secured permission to set up our camera and go to work. It was an enormous hall, brilliantly lighted, with a tremendous native orchestra at the far end. All around were booths and tables at which were seated exquisitely dressed women of various colours and men from all walks of life. Such a naïve people! So exuberant, so passionately in search of gaiety. We saw sailors from Madrid, Hindus, Cubans, Negroes, North Americans and Chinese. The latter were invariably small, brittle and dressed within an inch of their lives. The place reeked with cheap perfumery and perspiration.

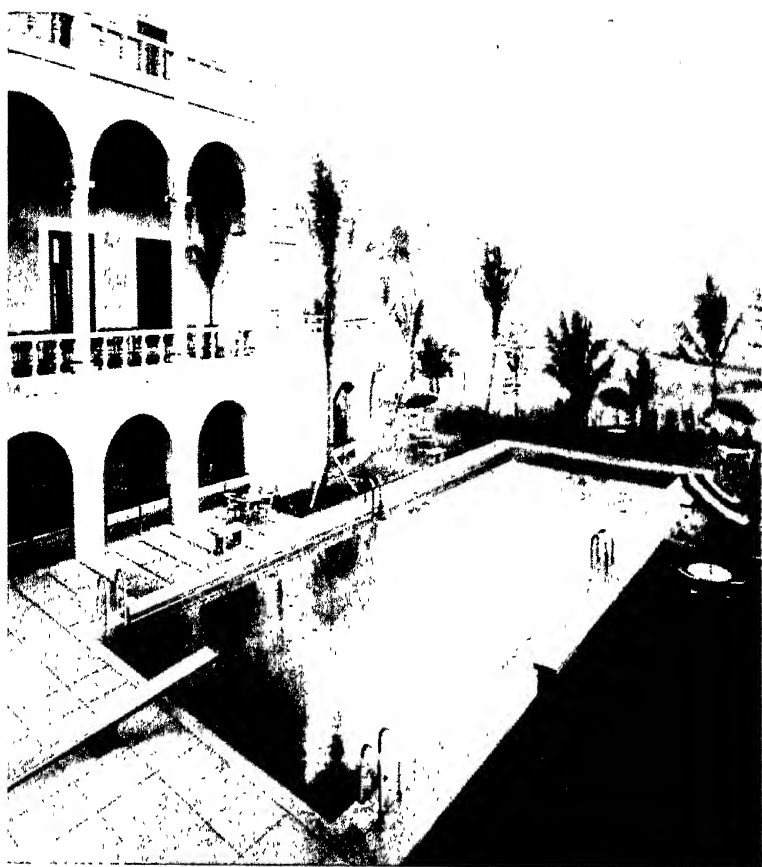
They all stared at us and we stared at them. During the intermissions when the music was not blasting forth they were crowded around us three-deep. But when the first sonorous note from the marimba was struck their curiosity vanished and they swept up their women and proceeded to the dance. Then we watched the swaying couples execute the intricate steps of the *danzon*. Then we listened to the throb of music that somehow has captured the sensuality and asceticism, the misery and contentment that for four centuries has taught Cuba her compassion. Guitars, drums rubbed and beaten by rosined fingers, maracas seething with tiny seeds, claves of polished lignum vitæ snapped in frenetic fingers—these were the ingredients that produced those melodic progressions of old Spain. Behind it came the steady and



Candid cameradventures ! There is no getting away from those little grey people who pop out of holes—and who wants to ?

Want to chance a dollar, or a hundred, or a thousand? Rumour has it that Havana's Casino will be happy to accommodate you.





Don't let anyone tell you that the American tropics lacks magnificent hotels. This glimpse of the Nacional at Havana will give you an idea. And if you were to wander through one of those archways, jingling a bit of silver in your pocket, God help you—because you're on the way to one of the grandest bars in the Caribbean.





(c) Gendreau, N.Y.

In Cuba it's alfresco. Perhaps it's the rhumba, perhaps it's a concert at a sidewalk café, or a round at Sanitary George's ('The first drink is always on George'), or perhaps it's . . .

disturbing beat of the tom-tom—that irresistible note of old Africa. That made us a sound picture. *Click.*

## 6

Wearily back to the ship with a couple of hundred feet of unexposed film still available. Rosy fingers of dawn are now groping up over the horizon. The sea laps gently at the piers and the fishing fleet stirs at the moorings. Rusty sails are being hauled up and the ships creak down the harbour out to the open sea.

Hastily we set up in the hope that here there may be a fugitive, beautiful picture in that elusive, evanescent penumbra of dawn.

What a coincidence that our camera should be trained upon one certain boat whose Cuban Captain bitterly resents our interest in his craft. He shouts angrily but we think he is talking to his crew, not to us. Various burlap bags filled with something are hastily lugged below decks out of the sight of our inquisitive telephoto lens. Sails are quickly hauled up, a powerful power plant throbs and the craft speedily departs from view, quickly outstripping all others and heads past old Morro Castle toward Key West.

The head bar-keeper at the Dos Hermanos is just opening his shop as we finish our picture.

“Know why he didn’t want the picture taken? Know why that ship has a special motor in addition to its sails? Know what was in those burlap bags?”

That Captain was getting five hundred dollars for each one of those bags safely delivered in Florida. He got the money in advance too. Contents of each bag—one live Chinaman. Reason for the bags—deceptive to the officials and easy to jettison on the high seas in case of an unexpected inspection. That *was* a picture. *Click.*

## *Jamaica Ginger Snaps—Spool Two*

### I

A GREAT people for using their heads, the Jamaicans. They carry bananas that way, baskets (bawskets to you) of coal, gasoline tins, water-jugs and such unusual items as suitcases, a pair of shoes or a plate with a couple of plantains on it. Even the caddies at the Golf Clubs have to be forcibly restrained from balancing the bags on their heads. Our moving picture crew spent quite a lot of time on the roads looking for head-balancing acts to film. Our time came at last when a big shambling negro came plodding down the dusty street kicking up whirlpools of dust as he picked them up and laid them down. What intrigued us was the fact that he had a red flag in either hand. It was not until he was up within close range that we were able to make out what it was balanced on his head. Merely a case of dynamite! That was a picture. *Click—and run like hell, boys. . . .*

### 2

Not too fast, though, for Jamaica is a country of winding roads and severe traffic regulations. Cruising around in an open car through the streets of Kingston is fascinating—but precarious. Sight, sound and smell—these are the things that count in Jamaica—and the greatest of them all, despite the terrific competition imposed by the others, is sound! The sound of the sea respiring gently against creosoted pilings. The rustling of the Trade Wind in the palms—it is this same Trade Wind that they affectionately dub 'The Doctor' due to its health-giving properties and dependability. There is the laughter and song of the negroes in the markets,

in the bars, on the streets. Everywhere you hear that glorious mouth-filling outskirts-of-Oxford accent. This is something that the casual traveller never seems to be able to comprehend—the broad ‘a’ English liberally spiced with the Cockney that prevails on this island which might reasonably be considered Polynesian in terms of its vegetation.

As we drove we were constantly propositioned:

“If yo’ wan see monkey cry, ’tick peppah in he yeye.”

“Take you buy fine cahlabawsh bawsket.”

“Bawss, I begs you fuppence.”

“Jockaws don’t fit for hars race.”

“Na mak’ sweet-mout’ fool you.”

“Darg hab liberty fe watch gubnor” (why not? A cat can look at a king).

Admonitions such as these were bounced out at us from all quarters. They were seldom backed up by any action. The Jamaicans simply love to hear themselves talk. There was only one exception—and we were fortunately ready for him. It was while we were cruising by the Gaiety Bar on Front Street. Within were great sweating blacks engaged in forking over to the distillers the few pennies they had so heroically wrested from the shippers unloading great hampers of coal. One of them disengaged himself and came toward us. To our astonishment he flung himself before the wheels of our car, shouting:

“Mawsh me down—pay me dahmage!”

*Click and brakes!*

3

Some moving picture expedition through Jamaica (not ours) did more to subvert the morals of the natives than ever was accomplished by the crew of Columbus’ flagship, the *Santa Maria*, when she lay scuttled on the north coast and the boys put in a year of unhampered anthropological research on the island. If you don’t believe it, just poke a Graflex or a Leica at some dock walloper or road worker and you’ll discover that there’s plenty of spirit left in the labouring class. Randy

language, lewd poses, rank exhibitionism and the hurling of decayed objects are typical reactions. Don't be alarmed—or disheartened. That stencil about the 'evil eye' is just a lot of idle chatter. A spot of coin will fix things up in short order and your subject will favour you with the stiffest, most unnatural pose conceivable.

Take that snaggle-toothed crone presiding over the bread-fruit in the market. She's a grand subject for Junior's photographic contest (and, come to think of it, you really ought to do something for Junior. He's been pretty decent about putting up with your antics on this trip).

"You are very good to look at, my dear," you therefore hear yourself informing the startled creature. "My son is collecting pictures of tropical beauties and it would be most incomplete without a couple of the fairest flowers of Jamaica. May I?"

"Oh Lawd me Gahd, suh," croons the crone, rocking her ample bosom in her hefty arm. "You tink me good to look at, oh Lawd!" She totters to her feet, spreading her prehensile toes for a better grip as she shimmies her shapeless body to the pure ecstasy of your dirty lies. But through it all she regards you appraisingly from dim, bloodshot eyes.

"Wan shilling," she finally decides—and she's letting you down lightly after that line you handed her. Anyway it's a picture. *Click.*

## 4

Snowball carts—*there's* a local institution for you. You find them on the Jamaican street corners and along the highways just as we find roadside purveyors of ice cream up North. They dispense scoopsful of shaved ice soused in coloured fruit flavourings. Ordinarily, you simply hold your hand out and shloop up the mess, although the proprietor *will* slosh your snowball into a fusty jelly glass if you insist. The names and slogans which decorate these carts put to shame the most recondite offerings of our Pullman car system. A few samples:

SPREE BOY IN GOD WE TRUST THE EARLY BIRD  
HERE WE ARE AGAIN ICE  
SNOWBALL BUFFALO BILL  
STAR OF THE EAST  
SAMUEL FULL SWING  
GREEN APPLE HAPPY MAN HERO BOY  
MAE WEST TALK HARD WHAT YOU WANT

That last one upon investigation proves to be no reflection upon Miss West's possible volume of speech in the matter of her personal desires, but means that the owner of the snowball cart, in addition to nourishing to his bosom a tender passion for this great star of Hollywood, is also hard of hearing and would appreciate it if his clients would speak right up, lest perchance he squirt a shot of raspberry on the snowball instead of the lemon that you ordered. We 'talked hard what we wanted' for some fifteen minutes before we came to an agreement as regards the amount he would take to permit us to film him in action—with sound. There was plenty of patronage involved but it was worth it. Blurp! Also *click*.

## 5

We motored across from Kingston en route to Montego Bay (the island's most famous North Shore resort) and after spending hours rafting down the Rio Grande, skirting Port Antonio, and filming the rugged beauties of the north coast, it became apparent that we would not reach our destination that night. Consequently I sent a wire ahead to a little inn reserving two rooms—there being two moving picture technicians, my wife and myself in the party. We arrived at dusk. A candid camera shot presented itself at once in the form of a tiny but oh-so-important black proprietor who lined us up and marched back and forth in front of us like a game cock.

"Who send this message?" He rattled the missive under our collective noses. I admitted having done so. What this had to do with it I couldn't determine. But at once he wheeled

on my wife and said: "Madam, you may proceed to room number seven!"

He glared at us three miserable men and finally snapped at the older of the two moving picture technicians.

"You, suh, may go to room number eight."

That left just two of us and I will confess that my heart was in my mouth until he finally pointed to my companion.

"You may go to room number eight—and you"—he turned his full four-feet-nine on me and bowed—"may share the madam's room!" Thus was an international incident avoided. I was so grateful that I insisted on a photograph. *Click.*

6

The Glass Bucket, Kingston's nearest approach to Broadway between 42nd Street and 59th Street, is (thank God) fifteen hundred miles removed. Nevertheless, here gather the social élite and the playboys with their girl friends. Usually 'Ship Night'—and ship night is any night when a large cruise liner is in port—is the only time when there's anything doing. On other nights the big dance floor is barren, the Jamaican moon sifts plaintive white fingers down through the palm trees around the open-air pavilion, the waiters are sour, and probably the best action you can get for your money is a go at the shilling slot machine. The first night I was there with a group of friends (not off a ship) the place was barren as an empty beer keg. Only one incident occurred to warrant our motor trip out there. Some young Englishman appeared about midnight, and peered cautiously into the entrance. Finding the place forsaken, he essayed a circuitous route to one of the high stools at the bar, mounted this gravely, ordered and drank and paid for two glasses of 'Gin and It,'<sup>1</sup> then announced to the bartender that he intended to rock his chair backward to a point where he could balance it absolutely free of the law of universal

<sup>1</sup> The jolly old English drink of gin and Italian Vermouth served in a cocktail glass strictly without ice is probably the foulest of all concoctions ever thrown together, actually purchased and consumed by anybody of his own free will.

gravitation. He hooked his heels into the lower spokes, pushed the stool back carefully, and actually did flutter there in a state of suspended animation for a matter of seconds before he fell over backwards, landing with a terrific and sodden impact on the floor. Being nearest to him and having a feeling of kinship for another white man, I hauled him to his feet, received his courteous 'thank you very much,' and he weaved an equally circuitous route out into the magnolia and the night.

But on 'Ship Night' it was altogether different—so different that one of our members who had brought along a couple of bulbs and a hand camera couldn't resist young John Gayle. He was a ragged, black urchin of twelve or fourteen, with the most prominent ears and feet I have ever seen incorporated on one body. After he suddenly projected himself into the centre of the brilliantly lighted dance floor during an intermission, apparently quite without the authorization or invitation of the management, he started to execute a weird sort of shuffling, barefoot tap dance. At first there was no musical support, but soon his graceful gyrations and uncanny sense of timing caused the piano player instinctively to improvise as the youngster went along. Eventually came the climax. Silence from piano and from those big brown feet. But before the astonished tourists could signify their appreciation by so much as a single clap of hands the young man flashed a mouthful of big buck teeth around the room and made the following announcement:

"Beer bottle caps, suh!"

Bottle caps (as well as coins) were flung about him and as soon as he had gathered eight of the former he inserted them between the toes of both feet, carefully picked up the monetary offering, and nodded to the piano player even as I nudged my cameraman. *That* turned out to be a tap dance with sound effects—and a picture of the same calibre. *Click.*



## *Panamaniacs at Large—Spool Three*

### I

SCHMALTZ was a buyer of something or other—fruits and vegetables in Kenosha, as I recall—and he made life miserable for us all aboard ship with his arrogant manner and attitude of ‘nobody can put anything over on me.’ The insufferable ass also enjoyed strutting before our camera every time we tried to take a deck scene.

The morning our ship slipped into her spotless concrete berth at Cristobal, Brother Schmaltz was telling all and sundry precisely how he intended to trim the Hindu wick.

“A lug of grapes or a phony ivory cigarette-holder—they’re all the same when it comes to me making a buy. . . .”

We scurried ashore, flung our stuff in a dilapidated horse hack (the Numdah floor rug was of beautiful white/camel hair with the Tree of Life design embroidered in vivid colours) and got organized on Front Street just in time to take a picture of Schmaltz before and after entering the first Oriental Bazaar.

A suave East Indian graciously bowed him in. Schmaltz entered under a full spread of sail. Within the dim and cloistered confines of the store were other Orientals, equally suave, all bowing and fluttering about in their pongee shirts. A glass-enclosed counter ran the three dimensions of the room, with the proprietor and his staff huddled about Mr. Schmaltz on the right, while directly across the room at the left and at the exit lurked a large ultra-modern cash register. A strategic spot.

Schmaltz examined the shantung. He fingered the Mandarin coats, drummed his stubby fingers against the brasses, blinked uncomprehendingly at the cloisonne, sniffed at the perfumes. Begrudgingly he complimented the boys on their collection

of black ebony elephants, actually came close to purchasing a pair of silk pyjamas, passed by the fans and sandalwood with nothing more than passing comments, and eventually wound up before the cash register.

Before him on the counter was spread a vast assortment of merchandise.

"What the devil's all this junk?"

The Oriental proprietor winced as though his face had been slapped.

"The honourable gentleman did our poor house the honour of admiring these goods. . . ."

"That don't mean I'm going to buy anything. Hell! I wouldn't give you fifty bucks for the lot." He started for the door and as the open-work Schmaltz pan came into range the camera commenced to crank.

"Psst!"

He turned. The proprietor, and behind him the others, bowed.

"The honourable gentleman first to inspect our humble wares to-day. Old Oriental custom say bad luck not make sale of some kind." As he spoke his brilliant black eyes held the large and bulging Schmaltz orbs as steadily as a cat might hold those of a bird. Imperceptibly at first, reluctantly throughout, the great Schmaltz feet retraced their steps. Meanwhile the bundle of merchandise, now neatly packed, appeared in the arms of one of the vassals.

"For the luvva . . ." Schmaltz shrugged his shoulders. "Sixty bucks." There was a world of contempt in his voice. He winked at us as he spoke.

"One hundred dollar."

"Sixty-five." Schmaltz gave us a leer. He was having fun.

"Sold!"

The Schmaltz features fell like the Stock Exchange on Black Friday. Unwittingly he had purchased all of thirty-five dollars' worth of spurious merchandise for a mere sixty-five good old-fashioned Kenosha dollars. *Click.*

## 2

Fancy a presidential palace open to the public—actually open, I mean. True, it was patrolled by a smart native militia, but we were permitted to stroll into the beautiful *patio* where the waters tinkled and the orchids bloomed. And could we take a picture? If so, was there any action we could get into it? Certainly we could. And as for action—what was the matter with . . . ?

As the guard spoke, a procession of stately egrets appeared from behind the fountain, followed by coral flamingos of great size and dignity. *Click.*

## 3

The streets of Colon<sup>1</sup> in the blazing heat of the mid-

<sup>1</sup> As with other famous tropical ports, Colon has been liberally limned by anonymous bards. One of the best-known lyrics (author unknown) goes something like this :

## COLON

I want to go back to Colon  
 By the Caribbean Sea.  
 I want to go back to Colon ;  
 Ah ! that is the place for me ;  
 Where bougainvillea and hybiscus bloom  
 Where nights are filled with sweet perfume  
 And seventeen niggers live in one room  
 Down Panama way.

I want to go back to Colon  
 By the Caribbean Sea.  
 I want to go back to Colon ;  
 It's home sweet home to me ;  
 Where over the mountains the gold sun sinks,  
 While all the tourists are lapping up drinks  
 And every street in the damn town stinks  
 Down Panama way.

Another one, perhaps from the same facile pen, perhaps even part of the verses quoted above, follows :

afternoon sun give no hint of what goes on under the blazing electric lights at 3 a.m. Night life is a drunken carousal as hectic as it is spurious, as glittering as it is artificial. Lipstick and perspiration predominate. A mist of alcohol is a backdrop against which a frenetic gaiety and spending take place. Orchestras, marimbas, radios, and phonographs vie with one another in making the night hideous. Bars are crowded. Half-dressed girls sit at the tables or stand at the bars, their predatory eyes always moving from face to face, from pocket to pocket, ever appraising, ever urging the patrons to let themselves go and to spend, spend, spend.

It is all too kaleidoscopic, too swiftly moving, too much in alcoholic soft focus for a movie. But the next day we have special permission from the proprietor of the Spanish Main Club to film his new batch of girls on their first afternoon rehearsal. The same ship that brought this new contingent to town on a three months' contract is destined to carry the old show back to the blessed North. What a contrast as the old-timers break the new ones in. All are typical show girls. They are dressed alike, they are built alike, dance alike, and talk alike. But they no longer look alike.

In three short months all the colour has been drained from young faces. The lustre has gone from eager eyes. Soft lines, engaging laughter, twinkling smiles—invaluable adjuncts in the show business—have been supplanted by pallor, lack-lustre eyes, and the harsh lines of fast living in the hothouse

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When the sidewalks fry and sizzle  
I would like to drink a swizzle  
In the Seaside or Cabana Cabaret.  
Where the radios are raucous  
And the gentle gonococcus  
Carries on, and on, impervious to pay.

For the evening breeze is fragrant  
And the yaller gals are pregnant  
Where I listen to the bold *bomberos* play.  
In the lovely old 'puh-lazza'  
Where the youngsters quite 'bar-azza'  
Shout and skip about and yell like hell all day.

country. Surely the keen, telescopic lens will register this age-old drama—cruel as it may be. *Click.*

## 4

We chartered a car and motored out to Gatun, passing the old French Canal that De Lesseps started under the French flag many years ago. On the way our chauffeur pointed out stakes along the excavation which, he said, marked the advance made day by day by Richard Haliburton who swam across the Canal and who was even taken in through the great locks on a tonnage basis just as a battleship might be. If what the chauffeur said was true, our Richard must have suffered with comfort: swimming so many hundred yards, then strolling out, lighting a cigarette, brushing off the mosquitoes, thumbing his nose at waiting alligators, and returning to his rooms at the Washington Hotel until he felt ready to take up the great struggle again. Leander didn't swim the Hellespont that way, nor Ederle the English Channel.

What most impressed me about the Big Ditch was the concept behind it. Instead of attempting an excavation programme so gigantic that it defied man (that was where the French made *their* mistake) the United States engineers decided to utilize Gatun Lake. The lake was too shallow for deep draught vessels, but instead of digging a channel it was decided to dam up this body of water. It became the greatest artificial lake in the world, with an area of 163 square miles, a shore-line of 1100 miles, and an elevation of 85 feet above sea-level. A series of locks were constructed by which ships could be lifted up to this elevation, at which point they would traverse the lake under their own power, enter the locks at the far side, and drop down again to sea-level. By following a route of mean excavation the actual canal channel is forty-two miles in length, or eight miles more than air-line distance. The passage between the Atlantic Ocean and Gatun Lake is made by three steps of Gatun Locks. On the Pacific side the passage between lake level and the ocean is made by means of Pedro Miguel Lock, Miraflores Lake, and Miraflores Locks.

A set of three locks similar to those on the Atlantic side would have been the ideal answer, but the engineers were unable to secure a site affording a firm rock foundation large enough to accomplish such a purpose.

A sleek grey battleship was steaming toward Gatun Locks as we arrived. By the time our camera was set up her lines had been made fast to sturdy steel mules which operate on tracks to the port and starboard. Placed at strategic points on either side of the ship these mechanisms held the giant dreadnought steady and moved her forward, ever forward, as the rush of water permitted. Probably nowhere else in the world is the engineering genius of a nation so eloquently expressed in terms of a visual as this scene. Assuming this ship was cruising from New York to San Francisco, this process of transiting the Canal reduced the distance of 13,135 nautical miles (by way of the Straits of Magellan) to 5262 miles—a saving of 7873 miles. That was a picture to be proud of. *Click.*

## 5

Up and down the streets of Colon we stalked our prey. Somewhere back of the Hindu shops in that vast tropical melting-pot of Italians, Syrians, Arabs, Russians, and Chinese must be some people busily employed with agile fingers weaving Panama hats. Hell's bells! Everybody has a Panama hat!

"Great Danes don't come from Denmark," observed my perspiring photographer. "They come from German Schleswig . . ."

"Shut up!"

"I've been to Siam," murmured the cameraman as he switched the awkward tripod from one wet shoulder to another, "but I swear I never saw a Siamese cat there . . ."

"Sure," I snapped, "they come from Burma and Angora cats don't come from Angora, they come from Persia—and what the hell has that got to do with Panama hats?"

"Nothing—much." The cameraman set the tripod heavily on the ground. "Only the man at the hotel this morning

told me that Panama hats are made at Santa Elena in Ecuador ! ”

A lottery man with a sandwich board on which were thumb-tacked hundreds of tickets passed by just then with a white-faced monkey perched on the top, a tiny Panama hat tilted rakishly over one ear.

“ Grab that,” I shouted. There was a picture. *Click.*

## 6

France field in the early morning. The entire staff is at work. The hum, the pop, and the roar of aeroplane motors drum in on the tympanum from all sides. Young men bare to the waist, proud of their nut-brown luminous skin, are already at work folding their parachutes, preparing for inspection. The shadow of wings sweeps ever across the parade-ground. There are scouting monoplanes with orange-coloured wings, bombing biplanes, amphibians on cradles. The Navy with its pert white cap set upon blonde sun-bleached hair rides high, wide, and handsome over Panama. *Click.*

# *Catching Central America Unaware—*

## *Spool Four*

### I. GUATEMALA

PACKING is a fine art in Guatemala and the *cacaxte* is the means by which tremendous cargoes of coffins, ridge poles, bath tubs, glassware, kindling, and food are carried fifteen to eighteen miles a day. The *cacaxte* is a wooden frame carried on the back with a strap coming up and across the forehead. Far up in the mist-swirling mountains we stopped our rickety car to watch a group of *Sololatecos* finish their meal, scramble to their feet, crouch against their eighty-pound loads, adjust their tumplines, and hoist themselves slowly, excruciatingly to an erect position, muscles of calf and neck standing out like bronze. Once steadied, they started forth on a dog-trot that would not come to a halt until many a weary mile had been traversed.

At Tzanjuyú, waiting for the launches, we furtively got our cameras ready as a man organized his family for the trip. It was amusing to see how the mother and father solved the problem of what to do with the two youngest members of the tribe. The tiny baby was slung in a capacious, brilliant scarf from its mother's back, but the next in line was carefully strapped to the top of the father's *cacaxte*. We noticed that the little fellow on the top of this contraption was face-up, while nearby another father was stowing a fat brown baby on his *cacaxte* face-down. The idea? Purely a matter of form: face-up for a girl, face-down for a boy. Such is the tribal rule. *Click.*



## 2. HONDURAS

Just outside the port of Tela lies a great experimental garden known as Lancetilla. Here are introduced, grown, and studied, crops from the tropical belt clear around the world. Eighty acres of rich bottom soil are ideally situated climatically and geographically to serve as a hothouse host to rare and exotic flora and fauna. There are leguminous green manures and cover crops; seedless limes; Satsuma oranges; Clementine tangerines; Siamese pumallos; mangoes from the Philippines; mangostines from Asia; litchi from the Orient. There are alligator pears, bamboos, Brazilian rubber plants, and countless other horticultural rareties.

There is also—and this explains the reason for our camera visit—a serpentarium. This pit, containing the most venomous and deadly snakes, toads, and lizards that the country produces, is situated several hundred yards from the Superintendent's house. One of his staff members accompanied us while we set up our tripod, and explained how the venom is extracted from these monsters to be crystallized and sent North for the purpose of making antivenine.

He vaulted lightly over the rail and started pushing the rattlers, boa constrictors, and the deadly fer-de-lance around with a cane. "This business of extracting venom is simple. It's almost like running a dairy. You see, we don't kill the snakes when we take the venom but simply hold them by the back of the neck, plunge the fangs through a membrane stretched across the glass, and manipulate the glands in such a way as to cause the fluid to be ejected. Here, I'll demonstrate."

The events that occurred in the next few minutes took place with astonishing rapidity. In the first place, the snake man called for Shem and Sham—two swarthy, lazy, and fatalistic East Indians. He wanted them to go up to the house and bring down the table, glass, and other paraphernalia which he used in extracting venom.

"What's the idea of the Far East?" I inquired.

"Turnover is sky-high here in the serpentarium," he answered. "The native labour won't mess around with

these fellows." He fished up a mottled fer-de-lance as he spoke. "Take this snake here. Ten minutes after he struck you you would lose the sight of your optic nerve and unless antivenine were administered immediately within the half-hour you would die as horrible a death as could possibly be imagined. Under those conditions you can't blame a man for not caring to work in this environment. But those Hindus are natural snake charmers and are fatalists anyway."

Perhaps he was a little careless. Perhaps he was so engrossed in answering the question that he forgot for a split second what he had on the end of that stick. All I know is that there was a flash of brown, a sudden scream, the staff man staggered back, flinging his stick and his snake to the farther corner.

"Oh!"

"My God, man, are you struck?"

He sat there in the middle of the compound with his hair dishevelled and his face grey-white.

"One of you get me a stick. Tear it off your tripod, tear it off a tree, get it and toss it to me quick." That was to keep the coiled snakes about him at a distance. "The other rush to the house and ask those Hindus to bring the gun—the hypo. Quick!"

I tore up the path to the office, encountering the two Hindus slowly carrying the table down steps.

"Drop that stuff! Your master's been struck. Where's the gun?"

They raised their hands in a gesture of defeat. The louder I shouted the more they shrugged. Who were they—no better than dirt—untouchables—to stay the hand of Allah? If death had been decreed—then the time had come . . .

The cook knew where the kit was and I got it back in double-quick time.

The staff man was prone on the ground, carefully laying about him with the stick, as I tossed him the stuff. His eyes were glazing as he fumblingly plunged the life-saving fluid into his veins.

*That was a picture—click.*

## 3. SALVADOR

We were on our way by narrow-gauge, wood-burning railway from Santa Ana to San Salvador—a distance of forty-eight miles. The conductor told us that it was not at all uncommon for this train to have insufficient steam to make some of the steeper grades, in which case it was considered good form for all passengers to turn out and help load the tender with kindling. We were all set for such a picture.

It was well that we were prepared because as our train limped through the junction to Acajutla we were fortunate enough to snap a scene of three skinny and predatory dogs calmly boarding the last car while the train was in motion. Mid great tail wagging they disappeared hungrily forward into that realm of second-class coaches, whence nothing alive ever returns !

We ran through vast stretches of lava flow, some of it only eight years old. It made an excellent roadbed and we were told that the track had to be relaid every time there was an eruption. Small steaming craters loomed up all around us. The railway maintenance must be pretty high on that section.

We did not attempt to photograph this region, however, because we had heard of the famous lava bed along the railway right-of-way from Salvador City to La Union. This bed covers the lower extremity of the Republic for many square miles around the still steaming cone of San Miguel. Many excitable Latins in our car pointed out the beautiful marble statue of the Virgin Mary which we could see clearly on an eminence to our left. As we drew nearer and nearer we were told that back in the seventeenth century Miguel erupted and flung its death-dealing molten flow for miles around to all the points of the compass. Farms and farm-houses alike were buried in this seething, terrible, onward march of lava. In desperation the simple folk in the valley supplicated the Virgin to protect them. But certain scoffers are said to have angered the Saint. Consequently nothing happened to stop the steady onrush of lava toward the city. Finally the populace united to a man in supplication, at which time, miraculously, the lava

was checked. As a mark of appreciation and proof for posterity the people moved the statue out of the shrine and placed it upon the very side of the crater at the point where the lava had ceased to flow, even in violation of the laws of gravitation. The story had just come to its close when we approached within two hundred yards of the magnificent figure which stands in simple dignity facing the lava bed. Sure enough, at her very feet the downward flow of grey had ceased and the fields between the Virgin and the track were green. That was a picture. *Click.*

#### 4. COSTA RICA

What's at Port Limon for a couple of hungry cameramen to snap in the half-hour before their train departs? There are three outstanding sights (so we learned), the first being the collection of sloths which swing by their tails in supreme indolence in the park by the sea. If ever the Great Creator took the four-letter word d-o-p-e and resolved it in terms of flesh and blood and then brought it to life (just barely) the sloth is the answer. Speaking of upside-down stomachs! Those sloths insisted upon digesting their meals upward, but, curse their eyes, they refused to do it when we had our cameras trained on them. They were, so we learned, in no hurry.

So we jumped into a car and rattled across town and the bridge to outstanding sight number two: the turtle farm. Here in the estuaries slumbered turtles weighing as much as five hundred pounds. We were told that they laid eggs the size and appearance of billiard balls. There were plenty of these white soft-textured eggs floating around and we had no difficulty in suborning a native lad to dive in and bring a couple of the big bruisers to the surface. But there was no picture there. Like the sloths, they were in no hurry to perform.

Anyway, we had to rush for the train. Our seats had been reserved in the first-class observation car and we settled down in hopeful anticipation of sight number three—Nellie!

A grand old snaggle-toothed party is Nell. She flutters about beneath the open windows of the coach, eerily pirouetting her vast shapeless bulk (in its equally shapeless Mother Hubbard) on a pair of bare feet the size and complexion of a couple of well-worn anvils. A battered straw hat, jaundiced with age, angles from her grey kinky head, and shades the beaming black face beneath it.

"Got a penny for Nellie?" she croons, smiling infectiously. "Who's got a penny for Nell? Nothing to buy and nothing to sell, but who's got a penny for Nell?"

A penny for Nell, indeed! We offered her one, we offered her several, in exchange for her picture. Nothing doing. She drew herself up in great dignity and held out for a dollar. She informed us that when she travelled to the interior she put on shoes and purchased first-class accommodations. Living on that scale, she informed us, cost real money. The price of shoe leather being what it was and the size of her feet being what they were, we capitulated. *Click.*

## 5. NICARAGUA

There's a public market at Greytown where moving picture cameras had never been seen prior to our arrival. A grand chance to get some pictures without the curse of movie-conscious natives anxious to pose. It is a sad truism that simple people all love to stand directly in front of a lens and leer. This is not conducive to good results. It is the unstudied effect that does the trick in travel films.

We were intrigued by the possibilities of the local roulette booth. The wheel was one of the upright kind that spins on an axle, the prongs on its numbered circumference rattling through a leather thong hanging above, until it finally comes to rest. The table consisted of a decrepit piece of oil cloth divided into numbered squares on which the peons patiently pitched small pieces of money. The action was furnished by the wheel and the croupier—a remarkably astute individual who started scooping the bets off the board even before the wheel stopped. There were bitter arguments but,

as I watched, the only times the croupier paid off were those when he begrudgingly tossed some vehement patron a pack of native cigarettes or a gaudy comb . . . never any cash.

I had a few minutes to wait for the technician to take photometer readings and set up the tripod. So I dug up my loose change.

"I'll play black," I announced in Spanish, placing a quarter in the proper square and keeping my thumb on it. Black came up.

"I'll leave it." Somewhat to my surprise he paid in coppers and nickels. Black won.

"I'll still leave it." By this time there was no need to hold the bet down—the clackers had been augmented by merchandise and tobacco coupons—and anyway everybody else was suspending operations, busy watching the sharp *Yanqui* break the bank.

That's just what I did.

I won five consecutive times on colour. The croupier was white to the lips. He dared me to bet on a number.

"All right—if you'll redeem all this junk for a dollar."

He agreed.

I pushed everything over on twenty. It came up !

And the roulette wheel came down ! In just two movements the proprietor dislodged the wheel and scooped up his oil cloth—including all the combs and cigarettes—and my winnings. Ducking and weaving through the market in as beautiful a demonstration of broken field running as I have ever paid to see, he took a dug-out in his stride—and last seen was dipping the spade-shaped paddle furiously into the water as he slipped out of my life. But the hand camera caught him. *Click !*

## 6. BAY ISLANDS OFF HONDURAS

A grey mistral howled down from the North, flagellating submissive palm trees, rattling tin roofs and rocking the ship at her berth at the coco-nut wharf. We had come over from the mainland the day before, lured by the cloudless perfection of the sky and the glassy somnolence of the sea. There had

been needlefish, dolphins, and sharks aplenty. Gulls accompanied us all the way over to the tiny island, just for a whack at the occasional grapefruit rinds that plopped out of the side of the ship. But that same night they spread their graceful wings and disappeared over the western horizon.

It was a Norther all right. Every minute the velocity of the wind increased and the sea ran heavier. The stevedores lashed the men into a sullen acceptance of high-pressure activity, the idea being to sling the remaining twenty thousand coco-nuts aboard ship before the storm became too menacing. It was a race against time and the man with the final say was the squarehead Captain. He stood it as long as he could. Finally a giant wave crashed his ship against the creaking piles and flung the heavy crockery clean across the galley. That was enough for him.

His great voice was drowned in the boom of the wind. The men kept staggering aboard with the bags, the winches still grated and scraped and the ship kept crashing against the side of the pier.

We boarded ship and got our cameras ready. The skipper, apoplectic with rage, mobilized his forces, ordered the forward winch power thrown against the submerged anchor, saw it hoisted, and drove his men with fire axes down upon the ropes that moored the ship. Fore and aft they snapped like violin strings and the vessel fairly leaped out into the harbour, flinging gang-planks, men, and coco-nuts into the boiling sea.  
*Click.*

## *Ring in the End of her Nose*

**F**LYING a thousand feet above the Canal Zone we saw the cargo boats at the giant piers: the white banana ships, the various *Santa* ships, the *President* ships, tankers from Tampa, limey liners from Australia, French steamers from Tahiti; vessels loaded with mother-of-pearl, pelts, Chilian minerals . . . Looking down, we glimpsed ships from world ports lined up alongside that astonishing excavation blasted out of the earth's red flesh. Instinctively the eye followed the canal on past Gatun and across the artificial lake which has inundated the forests but cannot submerge the black twisted trees where the vultures perch like the Harpies in the *Inferno*.

Everybody on the isthmus assured me that it would be nothing short of criminal to return North with my moving picture expedition lacking footage on San Blas. Thirty thousand of these San Blas Indians live on some three hundred and sixty-five islands, in a giant bay seventy-five miles south-east of the Atlantic entrance to the canal. So we chartered a giant amphibian and loaded therein our equipment and ladies and our San Blas Indian guide and took off down the coast of Panama.

"Sure you know the way, George?" I bellowed in his ear. George had a swarthy, dark face when he boarded the 'plane on this his first air trip, but now, as we rocked across the fringe of Colon and the pilot gave her the gun, George's complexion was about the colour of a tub of oysters. He gulped and made passes in the air meaning to imply that for many years he had cruised up and down the coast and so long as the 'plane kept the shore line in view he could direct us to his island home.



To accomplish the round trip in a day required an amphibian 'plane. There was always an element of danger involved in those treacherous tropical waters. Moreover, the San Blas Indians were a pure-blooded stock, unmixed with Negroid or Caucasian influences—and determined to stay that way. To this end they enforced a strict ruling on all of their islands. No foreigner was ever permitted to remain on one of those islands overnight. If no aeroplane or schooner was available trespassers were ignominiously flung into dugouts, paddled far out into the moonlit bay, and left with their anthropological curiosities ungratified.

The San Blas specimens we had seen on the isthmus did not average five feet in height. The men dressed inconspicuously in plain shirts and trousers, but the women were resplendent in gold nose rings, ropes of beads wrapped closely about their lower limbs in a manner quite similar to the way the Igorot women of Luzon wore coiled brass and copper about the calves of their legs, while their skirts and blouses were a brilliant red and blue. Although the islands and the Indians properly came under the jurisdiction of Panama, actually the Republic paid a small salary to each of three leading Indian chiefs (Inapaquiña, Nele Cantule and Robinson—in case you are interested) in exchange for which they agreed to fly the Panamanian flag in their respective dioceses.

Suddenly our guide's eyes eagerly scanned the sand-and-indigo coastline. He realized he was whirling over those tortuous, treacherous sea lanes through whose shallows and deeps he had so often steered trading vessels. We saw him lift his head and follow the long, outjutting peninsula away to the left. Swift, cold wisps of cloud swirled by, like shreds of cotton pulled from a bale. They obscured his vision and he sank back again, swallowing uncertainly as the 'plane bumped through the air pockets.

Then the clouds broke as though some Celestial wand might have been waved at them. Instantly the world was flooded with glorious tender sunlight. He rose and screamed something in the pilot's ear, pointing to the right. And

obediently the great ship banked and bore down on the wind, cutting straight across country.

Now we were slanting sharply down in a rushing oblique over a deep-throated bay full of islands, full of colour, full of life. Dotted the crescent sweep of water clean to the horizon were islands, each with its glittering beach and its wind-swept cocoa palms. Some were such silly little kingdoms that they boasted but one solitary hut, one solitary pig pen and one solitary dugout! Below us was an island with fifty huts, systematically placed along the rim of the shore. Others had ten huts, twenty or five. Every hundred feet or so there was another island. For this was San Blas Bay, whose many islands constituted much of the territory of an Indian race still as primitive as the day Henry Morgan put into Porto Bello fifty miles up the coast.

One hundred feet, fifty feet above the sea we raced along past these island homes. Indian women, nose rings aglint in the warm sunshine, rushed into the streets, their infants astraddle their hips. Sturdy bronze men, stripped to the waist, poled furiously after us, waving, beckoning, inviting us to visit their island. In response to the guide's excited pointing, the pilot banked down over a large island and taxied around it like a dog circling the place where he intends to sleep.

None of the boatmen, hovering about, would make a move to take us until we handed our two girls into the dugout and they were poled ashore. They were surrounded at once by a mob of flamboyantly dressed women and hustled up the street and out of sight. By the time the rest of us had loaded our gear into the boats and were piloted to the beach our ladies had disappeared.

The guide took us to the chief's shack, assuring us all along that the girls would not be harmed. Now we could hear the jabbering and laughter.

"What goes on in there?" I bawled. "Are you girls all right?"

"Oh Glory!" one of them replied. "You never saw such a thing. Worse than a bargain basement. They've got

half our clothes off and are bringing out all their ear and nose ornaments to exchange for our glass buttons, hair pins and lingerie clasps ! ”

Eventually the ladies joined us—a bit flushed and dishevelled but none the worse for their experience.

The guide induced a young mother to pose with her child before that tripod on which was mounted a terrifying monster with four gleaming eyes. The mother was arrayed in her best blue cotton dress which she wrapped about her middle and tucked in at the waist the way a man tucks a towel around him as he shuffles from locker to shower. This dress fell squarely to slender ankles which were tightly encased in beaded orange and yellow anklets. Her blouse was of bizarre Indian pattern, crudely but symmetrically worked. It was geometrical in design, reminiscent of the Navajo culture. Short-sleeved and full-bosomed, it imparted to her squat, mature torso a rugged dignity which was feminized by a gaudy string of scented sandalwood beads hanging down over her breast. Her neck was thick and her face swarthy. The inevitable mutilation—a thin strip of flesh taken from the nose—ran from between her brows down the bridge of her aquiline nose, terminating in a nose ring which hung to her lips. Her fan-shaped ear ornaments swung gracefully and accentuated the jet black, close-cropped poll.

The child was nude save for an enormous necklace of silver coins which hung in a glittering fan from throat down to a very round banana belly. Before we left the island we were to discover how wild the mothers were about silver coins. Quarters and half-dollars, yes, and dimes. Good reason, as the guide explained. Because they fashioned them into huge intricately wrought necklaces, some so heavy and ponderous as to hang clear to the hips of even a grown girl. Rare English and American coins we discovered in these ornaments—some a hundred years old—all of which tended to establish the aristocracy of the family owning the heirloom. What a hunting-ground for the numismatist !

Our pictures were a conspicuous success. The technician had exposed all the film in both camera magazines. Conse-

quently we moved into a large thatch hut to reload the cameras. The floor was clean-swept sand, packed hard. Walls and roof were of palm thatch, while the structure was held up by low-slung cross beams on which loose planks and other suitable flotsam provided shelves for clothing and fish nets. There were several grass hammocks strung up, and two long, severe wooden benches.

As might have been anticipated, the whole tribe tumbled pell-mell into the place, pushing about, full of insatiable curiosity. The first discovery they made that truly amazed them was that the cameraman's shirt was soaking wet. After an hour under that blazing sun, lugging that heavy apparatus from one end of the street to the other, it was small wonder. But it seems that the men folk don't perspire in San Blas. Or if they do it evaporates right away on their nude torsos. Consequently the phenomenon of perspiration caused great interest. Inquisitive hands felt his arms, his legs, his back, patted his bare wet hands and face.

After all our work was over and our equipment had been restored to the hydroplane, we gathered in the big shack to barter and wrangle, with the guide acting as master of ceremonies. Speaking of bargain basements! The women ran to their houses for their treasures, returning with ornaments of gold, shell, wood, and cloth. Nose rings were bought for five dollars—wooden idols, one to four feet, brought fifty cents to a dollar. It was interesting to learn that the figures in high hats, bowlers, and cutaways were patterned after the whalers of New Bedford and New London who had established friendly relations with the San Blas tribe back in the early nineteenth century. One woman felt very badly because she couldn't get a bid on her choicest treasure—an electric light bulb which had been washed ashore on her little island.

During the course of our barter we acquired a necklace of wooden chips which, when rubbed between the palms, gave off a heady, pungent odour. This treasure went for a dollar. Golden ear plates cost about as much as nose rings, hand-sewn blouses, intricately fashioned from numberless tiny patches of material—reds, blues, mauves, and greys, well-balanced,

harmonious—the work of patient hands and eyes—were priced at two to four dollars. In every case the designs had a special secret significance—the birds and beasts of the mythical San Blas lore.

As a final gesture of international amity I presented my zipper tobacco pouch to the chief who had been eyeing it covetously ever since the miraculous contrivance had been demonstrated.

## *What the Well Dressed Latin Wears*

CHINA is not the only place where they wear their shirt tails outside—they do it on the Central American docks. Woolworth's is not the only establishment that sells red celluloid combs aglitter with glass diamonds—you can buy them or see them in Havana or Colon. Gold Medal Flour is not the only substance poured into those flour bags—wait until you have seen a coy Nicaraguan virgin whose plump brown body is encased in a nifty flour bag slip, with the trade mark still in evidence. In evidence? Why, I once saw a little San Blas Indian girl wearing one of these flour bag undergarments, the design and lettering of which she had patiently embroidered with her own hand for posterity!

By far the most colourful costumes are those of the Guatemala Indians. Here you see women, each a study in brown and blue or red and blue, trotting along so erectly with their massive terra-cotta *ollas* balanced on their heads. You see them crowding about the stations—beautiful, simple, sturdy girls in long red dresses reaching to the ankles and frequently trimmed in a wide flounce of exquisite lace. Each tribe has its own particular pattern of embroidery for skirt and blouse just as the clans of Scotland have their tartans. The girls march along beneath the car windows with their baskets of food on their heads, walking with a swaying motion, their full skirts held out daintily on both sides and melting into intriguing patterns against the free stride of their legs and hips. The men sport white aprons, woollen shorts, and hand-knitted tunics, as well as silly straw hats perched on their black thatch.

Down in the hot country the labourers and soldiers wear

shapeless cotton trousers stained with bananas and butchery, loose cotton shirts, and battered straw hats. Some wear leather sandals with thongs between the great and second toe, Japanese fashion, but the majority have feet so wide and so tough that the pain comes in putting on shoes, not going without them. All that is required to transform one of these labourers into a soldier is the addition of a red or blue ribbon in the hat and a strip of coloured piping down the pants leg. Enormous glittering chevrons are furnished for the non-commissioned officers and are simply pinned to the shirt because promotions and demotions come swiftly and unexpectedly ! The women in the low country wear simple white blouses and skirts of coarse cloth. These garments they are constantly thumping against the rocks and it is seldom indeed that one finds a girl on the street without clean clothes.

Why do travellers get so excited over nude natives in the sea or the river ? My moving picture men were forever trying to sneak a little footage of this type, even though they knew my instructions were to see that no footage of this sort was to be exposed except on assignment.

Now, my relations with these moving picture men were most cordial. We drank together, sang together, roistered around together. We worked long hard hours under the brassy sun. Yet, let my back be turned only long enough to buy a bottle of beer or placate a Customs official or a local Comandante, and sure enough, when I came back, I was bound to be confronted with the spectacle of these men grinding away at the native women in the river or the sea.

I suppose it is because my life has been spent so largely in tropical countries that I am insensible to the intrigue of nude native women industriously pounding clothes on a rock. Evidently this is sure-fire stuff for the news-reels. Why, I don't know. As a boy in Japan I used to bathe in public pools in mixed company without thinking anything about it except that I was naturally conscious of my own white skin in contrast to the copper of the others. In northern Luzon, as a schoolboy, I used to pass bronze Igorot women assiduously washing their powerful limbs and ample breasts with no more

thought of the matter than seeing my own companions in the shower bath. In Honduras and Guatemala it meant no more to me to see the Indians and the blacks wallowing in the rivers and splashing in the surf than it does to you to see your own people parading about the beach in their present scant bathing attire.

Once a traveller becomes accustomed to this kind of nudity he thinks nothing of it. But apparently we North Americans are young and provincial. At any rate it seldom fails that the tourist goes into a tailspin the first time he sees five innocent brown women standing or squatting in a stream pounding their clothing or scouring themselves with water and sand. Better get used to it, because even as I write this thousands of tropical browns and blacks, men, women, and children, are naively disporting themselves in countless rivers, lagoons, and fine-spun sandy beaches.

Let's not forget that classification composed of 'shoe hombres' or 'dandies.' These red-hot sports have saved up and ordered their clothing from one of the mail order catalogues, the consequence being that there is a plethora of peg top pants, lavender silk shirts, collegiate hats, and offensive neckwear in the tropics. This element goes in for shoes—and what shoes! Either patent leather, dancing pumps, or maple-coloured sport shoes with large knobs. The entire ensemble is frequently set off by a liberal application of *fleur de horse* or some other equally delectable toilet preparation calculated to more than offset man's natural odour of perspiration.

The gentry, of course, wear immaculate whites, linens, and gabardines, which are excellently tailored and which are highly comfortable. The boys that hang around the corner saloon could hardly be expected to copy this, however, and as far as the sturdy Indian tribes are concerned—well, they aren't concerned!



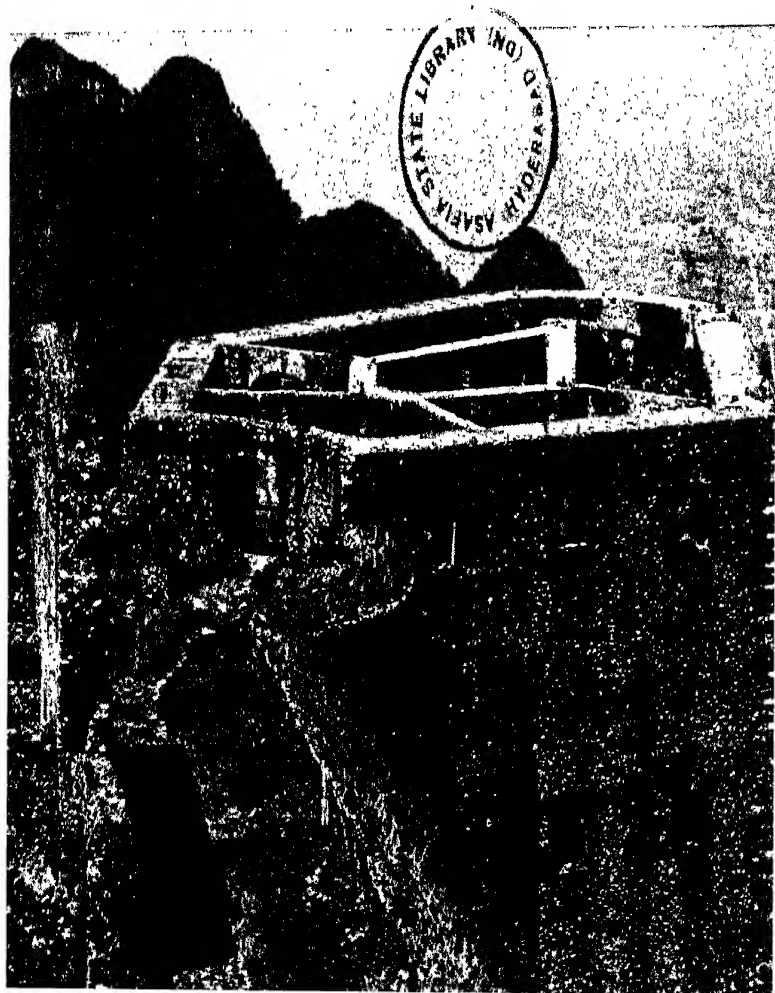
## Consider the Gentle Lottery

IT toils not ; neither does it win !

What the numbers game is to the vast army of people in New York's lower income brackets, the National Lottery is to Latin America. While it is true that certain racial factions—particularly the Chinese—have their own gambling forms—these are fugitive and ephemeral. They come and they go. They are, as a rule, outside the law. They have no particular substance and no particular following. But *La Loteria*, whether it be in Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Colombia, Honduras, Costa Rica, or whatever Republic you may care to mention, is a substantial, respectable, and highly patronized form of gambling, under Government subsidy, and better calculated than anything else that bears the stamp of legality to separate the peon from his peso.

Wherever you may go, drifting through these ports in the Caribbean, one of the outstanding characteristics will be the long strips of lottery tickets for sale on sandwich boards at every street corner, and displayed in merchants' windows along with the drugs, hardware, liquor, or whatever it may be that is supposed to be sold at that establishment. On all sides you are accosted with numbers that loom up with twice the prominence of a motor car licence plate—numbers that are constant—numbers that are painted on boards and left to withstand the rigours of the weather just as permanently as the residents' numbers on the door. This merely means that the *dueño* of the establishment has the 'concession' to sell his particular number every time it is issued—whether that may be weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Remember, the Latins are as superstitious about number combinations as the Harlem

Prow of Christophe's Citadel in Haiti—pointing magnetic  
north and rising hundreds of feet above the highest peak in  
the Island's Cordilleras.









See the little house in the foreground ? It lies in the centre of the great parade-ground of the Citadel. And in it repose the bones of a black giant who consecrated his life to the construction of a monument to the memory of all African slaves. The Pharaohs, with their pyramids and Sphinx, never approximated the gigantic achievement of this magnificent building.

negro. Once they start to purchase a certain combination of numbers they are likely to stick with it from then on. Some may not insist upon the whole number sequence (as a rule each lottery number consists of five digits such as 01428), but they are very likely to insist upon the same termination (in the case of this illustration that would be 28) inasmuch as minor prizes are distributed on terminations.

A good many years ago a perfectly lovely story got out about the Panama Lottery. This was back in the days when the Big Ditch was being dug and there was plenty of money being booted around. The Government at Panama City, alert to get as much cash back as possible from the people who stole their land, was running a weekly lottery with the grand prize of five thousand dollars gold and, of course, hundreds of smaller prizes as well as a special lottery every fourth week with a grand prize of seven thousand five hundred dollars. These weekly lotteries were drawn in the public square at Panama City every Saturday noon. As is the case with all these Latin lotteries, and as shall presently be explained in detail, these drawings are conducted in public. Anybody with a ticket or a 'piece' (lottery tickets are usually made up in a sheet of twenty pieces. If the whole ticket is valued at five dollars, naturally each piece costs twenty-five cents, and, of course, is entitled to one-twentieth of whatever the prize might be, provided that number wins) may stand by and verify the winning number and thereafter collect. One thing you *can* say about those lotteries—they are not crooked and they pay off promptly. True, there are rackets associated with them, but they are all predicated upon one point—and that might as well be cleared up right away: Let us assume that the Commission operating a weekly lottery issues ten thousand tickets, each consisting of twenty pieces. Now, through street salesmen, shopkeepers, merchants, people in public offices, and itinerant representatives, these ten thousand tickets are made available to the public. Perhaps the Commission through its representatives is only able to dispose of eight thousand of them. This leaves two thousand left unsold, and inasmuch as they are Government property the Government

may, if it so elects, distribute them free, gratis, or at reduced rates on a patronage basis or in the interests of politics. Bear in mind that that in no way affects *your* chances of winning. You pay a set amount for your number. If that number is drawn, you collect. If a number is drawn that was never purchased, whether the prize reverts to the national treasury or goes into the pocket of the Secretary of Public Relations need be none of your concern—you weren't in the chips anyway!

But to get back to this Panama Lottery run during the construction days: the drawing took place every Saturday noon in the public square at Panama City. There were several outlying towns in the Republic of Panama, so remote from the capital city that they had no telegraphic connection nor any other means of communication except courier. In such cases it was the practice of the Government to permit their representatives to continue selling lottery tickets up to 5 p.m. Saturday even though the drawing had been made at noon. After all, there was no possible way that the winning number could be communicated to these far-distant points and *Dios* knew that the Government needed the revenue.

Way up on the northern shore of Panama is a beautiful harbour and a tiny banana port known as Bocas del Toro. Here plied banana steamers in never-ending succession, carrying their green-gold cargoes. Here lived an ever-growing colony of labourers and white men engaged in the ramifications of the banana industry and well heeled with ready money at all times. This was one of the richest sources of lottery income, and since it was utterly removed from all sources of immediate communication with Panama City, Bocas was one of those favoured to sell tickets until sundown.

There came a period of about a year and a half when governmental statistics revealed that scarcely a week passed without somebody winning the grand prize. This was most unusual and most disheartening because it was not at all uncommon for the Government to hold in its residue of unsold tickets the winning number week after week. The horrid truth finally came out: there was a commercial wireless station at Panama

City and some genius discovered that a banana boat arrived at Bocas del Toro every Saturday afternoon to load bananas that night. Each of these banana boats was equipped with up-to-date radio apparatus in order to communicate rapidly with headquarters and Northern markets. It was just a question of learning who the chief radio operators on these steamers were and then laying a beautiful pipe line !

Promptly every Saturday at 3 p.m., as the banana boat would slip into the cloistered harbour of Bocas, the radio man in Panama City would flash him the winning number. A well-organized shore crew would then fan out, combing the territory and prepared to buy whatever tickets might be available with that number or with number terminations that would automatically insure them prize-winning tickets. Oh, it was sweet ! It was foolproof. If ever there was a case of a slot machine that guaranteed to pay a jackpot every time a coin was put into it, this was it. The boys worked it out well too. Each week, one of their members was elected to take the winning tickets over to Panama City to be cashed, thus making it very difficult for the Government to learn how great a proportion of its prize payments were concentrated in that tiny little town of Bocas. Eventually one of the boys popped off because he was not satisfied with his share of the cut. It was the old, old story. The goose laid no more golden eggs : the Government lottery went on a strict 12 noon Saturday closing !

There are no end of exciting yarns constantly being circulated about these lotteries. Passengers, steamship crews and officers are always buying and, of course, always moving on, thereby enjoying all the thrill of uncertainty sometimes for weeks before one learns that he may have five or ten thousand dollars coming to him on demand. Ships' radios on drawing days are taxed to the utmost to post other ships and ports as to the winning numbers and it is not uncommon for such a number to be passed along in a garbled fashion, thus leaving some poor benighted soul to spring up from his desk or his



work and rush to the nearest *cantina*, there to 'shoot the works' with all and sundry—only to wake up the next day with a vicious hangover, an enormous bill, and a strictly non-winning lottery ticket. There comes to mind the case of dear old Poncho Galvez, who ran the Bandera Americana *cantina* down in Nicaragua. Galvez was hale-fellow-well-met with his patrons, but his home life was not that sweet and tranquil existence it might have been. True, Maria, his woman, had not gone to the trouble of securing a marriage licence, but they lived together as man and wife for many years and she did all his cooking and kept the place pretty well cleaned up. Once in a while Poncho would toss her a peseta or maybe give her a piece of his lottery ticket. This particular time he got unusually big-hearted and gave her four pieces and the inevitable happened. Well, you never saw a man reveal himself the way Galvez did when the import of the winning number sank into his sodden brain. He promptly took the tickets away from Maria, but he reckoned without that spark of spirit that lay deeply within her Indian bosom. She went on the warpath herself and her shrill voice could be heard up and down the streets of the town for blocks as she pursued her man with a meat cleaver. Right to the Treasurer's office she followed him and there she not only made him turn over the tickets but forced from his twitching lips the confession that he had indeed given them to her . . . whereupon she collected !

Last time I was in Havana I had a long confidential session with my controls and emerged with the passionate conviction that the termination 23 would represent the last two digits of the winning number at the next drawing of the lottery. The Cuban grand prize is one hundred thousand dollars gold, and there are twelve hundred and thirty-seven other prizes ranging in value from a mere one hundred dollars to twenty thousand dollars. There are twenty-one thousand numbers in this lottery and I spent night after night cruising about the city looking for my pet termination. I found plenty !

I was on hand the day of the drawing, prepared to defend my position and to justify my faith in my controls by hauling away a large lump of dough. In fact, so sure was I of the result that I had movies made of that drawing. The termination that day was *not* 23, but I saw exactly how the wheels go round—and here's how.

The lottery is housed in a portentous building. Anybody is privileged to go into this building and observe in the room where the drawing takes place not only the machinery by which it is done, but, more impressive by far, he may see for himself the ball with his number carved on it. There are twenty-one vertical wires, each strung with one thousand balls—the first wire naturally carrying those numbered from 1 through 999, the second from ball number 1000 on through that numbered 1999, and so on. This looks like a giant abacus. And there beside these twenty-one thousand participating spheroids are one thousand and thirty-six other balls on whose polished surfaces are carved denominations ranging from one hundred dollars on up to one hundred thousand dollars. There are two hundred and two more prizes—but they are approximation prizes determined only after the first and second prizes shall have been drawn, since there are no balls to represent them. So you march into the building with your full ticket number 16731. You proceed to the sixteenth vertical string, skim down to the seven hundreds and 10 ! there's that demure little wooden pill which bears your number 16731. Then just to comfort yourself you step over to the prize balls and tenderly gaze upon that elusive little pellet whose gleaming flank is branded \$100,000.00.

So far, so good. Now comes the day of the drawing. It is seven o'clock in the morning and the village fathers in solemn convocation huddle about a ponderous brass and steel contraption which looks as though it might have played some part in the torture apparatus of the Spanish Inquisition. In appearance it is a giant globe, wire-meshed in such a way that one can see its contents. At the moment there are no contents, but when the auditorium has been filled with people and others are crowding into the rear of the room, the President

of the Lottery Commission personally unlocks the twenty-one vertical strings of balls and personally and publicly dumps them into this great drum. Every last ball goes into this seething wooden mass and you have seen with your own eyes that ball number 16731 has gone forward with the rest. But, as though this was not convincing enough, a long metallic cornucopia is wheeled up and its mouth connected with this crib. Another crib is attached to the upper end and as a button is pressed and the dynamo hums an arrangement of discs whirls the balls up in through the neck of the horn of plenty and into the globe. Your pellet number 16731 now has about as much personality as Buddy Rogers in a New York subway jam.

The backfield and the apparatus now shift to the outer side of the room and proceed to induct the thousand and thirty-six prize balls into another crib and then through the same cornucopia up and into a smaller crib beside the large one containing the numbered balls.

It is all tremendously impressive. Orphan lads (over nine and under fourteen) appear in their fresh-face innocence and take their stands at two crystal dishes which the two globes feed into. A tribunal sits at a long polished table prepared to tabulate returns, and supervising the simultaneous, mechanical release of one ball from the number globe and one ball from the prize globe. As the number ball comes out it is seized by the orphan, who reads the number in a thin piping voice and then promptly threads it on a waiting vertical wire. Simultaneously the other orphan boy seizes the prize ball and announces whatever denomination it may record, after which he too threads his on another wire string. Thus the first ball out may be 01323 (what did I tell you about my termination hunch?) while the prize ball may say five hundred dollars. So it goes until numbers and prizes have been drawn for all the prize balls. Naturally, the drama mounts in excitement the longer the grand prize holds out.

It is really very simple. You have followed the fate of your ball number 16731 all through this process and now, if you

have sufficient time before your steamer leaves, just be patient and stand by until it and the grand prize ball issue simultaneously from the two cribs. Nothing to it but that—and the money is right there for you.

Well, good luck !

## *Citadel Incredible*

**W**HEN the S.S. *Colombia* grated her spoon down through the hawse and into the glassy waters of Cap Haitien in the peaceful early hours, a chill ran down my spine !

A chill at nine o'clock off the heat-glazed beach of Haiti's hottest port ? It may seem incredible, but there was a good reason for it—an ever-so-distant silhouette of a monument etched against the uttermost horizon—a silhouette no larger than a doll house, yet so formidable and so fantastic that the structure must stand as one of the greatest permanent triumphs ever recorded in mortar and stone by the hand of man—I refer to Henry Christophe's Citadel.

Perhaps it was because I knew more about the tropics than the others, having lived there for six years and having visited the ports of the Caribbean regularly ever since for fifteen, but certainly that distant Citadel was vastly more impressive to me than the importunate beggars in their dug-outs alongside the ship or the nautical salesmen with their offerings of silver, mahogany, and ringtailed monkeys, who were bidding so successfully for the attention of the other cruise passengers. I kept my peace, however, and later I was glad that I had, for all the reading on the subject was as nothing compared to the actual experience of swinging around that final turn in the zig-zag trail, to be confronted with the prow of that magnificent fortress, so perfect architecturally that it seemed to be a continuation of the mountain peak on which it was set !

There were some twenty-five of us who boarded the launch and drummed across the unruffled harbour to the jetty.

Buses were waiting. At once we boarded them and roared through the sun-baked road eastward past huddled groups of shacks wattled with manaca palms. We were an incongruous looking group ; our ages ranged from fourteen to fifty. We were dressed in the most disreputable garments that we could find in our cruise wardrobes ; all of us had been warned that there was a tough assignment ahead of us. Anybody who had cared to study that mighty mountain fortress miles and miles inland could have anticipated that much.

Our destination by motor bus was Milot, twenty miles inland from the bay, where Christophe, for reasons best known to himself, had ordered his palace of Sans Souci to be constructed in 1812. I will admit that in my casual tour of investigation of the ruins of Sans Souci I could not be unduly impressed. Its architecture struck me as being incongruous, flamboyant, though durable. The grand staircases, the fountains, and the noble façade were still more or less intact. But within it was just the shell of another tropical ruin. I had seen many such in Cartagena, Colombia, and the highlands of Guatemala. Certainly there was nothing about the ruin of Sans Souci to indicate that it was once the finest mansion in the New World. The masonry was grey and lichen-covered, nothing to compare with the original yellow stucco finish, red-tiled roof, and magnificent play of water that once ran out from the keystone of the marble arch and dropped twenty feet over a wall of robin's egg blue to eventually ripple away through channels painted a rich Pompeian red. Such was the case, however, our Haitien guide assured us, and we learned that the mountain stream was originally conducted under the floors of the great halls of state on the main floor to keep them cool ! It's a long cry from cool-conditioned noble halls and chambers paved with marble and panelled with polished hard wood, decorated with tapestries, mirrors, and the finest antique furniture, to forsaken hollow walls whose floors are rank with weeds and lizards, and through whose gaping doors and windows browse Haitien goats and swine.

No, I was not interested in Sans Souci ; I knew that it was

in this building that the giant black King of Haiti shot himself with a golden bullet as he lay swathed in a white satin robe on his bed, almost completely paralysed, while his kingdom tumbled around him and he could hear the vandals crashing through the lower chambers of Sans Souci. What I wanted to experience was the Citadel and that heart-breaking seven kilometres of mountain trail up which one night toiled Christophe's queen, his two slim princesses, and a little fierce old man named Vastey, who, between them, carried the weight of the great king's body up and up to the portals of that formidable fortress, there to heave his remains in a lime pit, lest his followers mutilate the body. I wanted to see for myself what obstacles those sweating blacks had to overcome to transport three hundred and sixty-five huge bronze cannon, hundreds of casks of gun-powder, countless thousands of iron cannon balls weighing twelve, thirty, and fifty-six pounds—not to mention the staggering number of tons of mortar and stone that went into the construction of the Citadel.

Manga was his name. He was my guide, and I inherited him just as I inherited Ninette, the spindly legged jenny it was my misfortune to mount at the picket line where once champed the caparisoned horses of Christophe. Each one of us was supposed to have a mount and a guide. Having been brought up in the United States Cavalry, I thought that I was a pretty shrewd judge of horse flesh and Ninette looked all right to me in the early morning. Nevertheless, she collapsed on the way down the trail in the evening, precipitating me and my camera, my wrist watch, sun glasses, and pith helmet over her head and on down the cobblestone trail for some thirty or forty feet. I don't hold this against Ninette, but Manga lost himself a tip at that point. It was his duty to guide my animal as she picked her way delicately along the precipitous trail, both upward and downward. But Manga was more interested in borrowing my tobacco pouch and then skirting off along obscure foot trails to meet me on the zig-zag trail kilometres later. I soon learned when he was about to do this, because

in each instance he would fling a mouthful of patois French at me, point vaguely ahead, fetch Ninette a sharp, unexpected and unwarranted slap across her back (causing the good creature to almost leap out from under me) and then disappear in the underbrush to greet me fifteen minutes later, squatting on his heels and placidly smoking his clay pipe (with my tobacco). I had been told also that it was against the rules for him to talk, but Manga was utterly uninhibited. He loved to talk and he had an interminable routine about what a splendid chap was Manga, and wasn't he just before becoming the father of a brand new baby, praise God, a boy he hoped, and would I therefore be doubly sure to cross his palm with silver—and could he have another shot at my tobacco pouch?

I never knew a man who derived such satisfaction from pronouncing his own name.

"Me Manga. Manga. Manga, me." This to the accompaniment of a furious chest-thumping, as though through his veins flowed the blood of King Christophe himself (come to think of it, maybe it did). Then would follow his baiting—for he loved to hear me respond to his reading :

"Ma—ma," he would say.

"Ma—ma," I would reply.

"Ma—ma?" he would query.

"Ma—matoca," I would give him (for no good reason—it's the name of a residential section outside Santa Marta, Colombia, but the rhythm tickled him a shade darker than God created him).

He would cavort in delight, slapping his thigh and yip-yipping like a Comanche. Then, with hands outspread he would turn to me for a new angle.

"Tell me, Manga, old sporting print," I would suggest as Ninette bent to her task, "what about this Citadel? Is it true it's seven kilometres up the side of this mountain? Straight up? And is Ninette supposed to carry me?"

Manga was at Ninette's bridle, guiding her as she picked her delicate way over cobblestones, rocks, and ruts through the dappled sunlight up the sharply inclined trail.

"La Citadel. Me, Manga. Slo!"



"That whips me," I responded.

Evidently he got it. At least he hauled off and fetched the poor animal a terrific whack on the rump with a switch.

"Slo !"

Well, that caused dear old Ninette to lay her ears back and knock off nearly a kilometre at a fairly reasonable rate before the inevitable collapse.

"What else do you know, pal ?" I asked him.

The black face brightened, if such a thing is possible.

"Snap !"

This time he laid down a veritable barrage against Ninette's prominent ribs and that's the last I saw of him for almost an hour, while the little animal plugged along, ever upward on that precipitous zig-zag towards the black King of Haiti's monumental contribution to the emancipation of his people.

I figured that we must be more than half-way up the incline. It was hotter than next year's fan dance, but I still couldn't bear to have poor Ninette die with my legs around her withers. I got off.

"Much farther ?" I put as much geniality as I could into it. Manga shook his head sadly and mumbled a mouthful of bad French. We plodded along in silence—the three of us. You know how it is when a group falls into a sudden deadly silence at a party ? That's what caused me to finally turn and say :

"Oh, come on, Manga, you must know *some* other word in English."

Did I say his face brightened before ? This time it lighted up like a beacon on the River Styx.

"Scram !"

Evidently he took it as an invitation. At any rate, before the astonished eyes of Ninette and myself he leaped into the saddle, laid around him with a switch like a man possessed, and the poor animal disappeared up that trail after the manner of a motor-cycle escort up Park Avenue.

I found them both there when I finally arrived, foot-sore and weary—Manga placidly squatting at the entrance

to the Citadel smoking the last of my Blue Boar, Ninette nibbling daintily at cogán grass.

"Wait for me, will you, pal?" I pleaded. "I want to wander through this building and take a look at the far-flung lowlands and seascape of dear old Haiti. I want to study this incredible, extravagant, bizarre, and absolutely fantastic construction. It doesn't make sense—but neither do you. Savvy?"

He grunted. He deliberately knocked out the cake of his pipe and pointed to the empty bowl. I shook my head sternly. He shrugged, lay back in the grass, and started to pick his teeth with a dandelion green.

"I'll be back soon. You wait—see?" I put all the executive ability I had into that command.

"Slo," he murmured.

I gathered that he meant I could take my time.

"Snap," he added as an afterthought. I disappeared into the mouldy, dank entrance as his taunting voice floated after me:

"Scram!"

Neither Manga nor Ninette did me any disservice by making me toil up that path on foot. After all, Henry Christophe used to put in eight early morning hours at his Court, then climb the three-hour trail in the sweltering sun, take his place on the scaffold and do as much manual labour during the luminous night as his best mason had accomplished during the day, then come down the tortuous, dangerous trail in the dark—back to his palace at Sans Souci. Thus thought I as my feet trod the narrow way where a century and two decades before, groaning and perspiring nobles and Ambassadors, in full regalia, might have toiled upward to pay obeisance to the King of the Blacks.

Since leaving the ship, the Citadel had not once been visible. From Sans Souci at the foot of the range the gigantic monument could not be seen. Nor could it be glimpsed at any stage of the journey up the mountain. Frequently the zig-zag offered vistas of unparalleled magnificence (remember—this was before I had achieved the Citadel) to the north. There,

two thousand feet below, Sans Souci danced in the heat waves, and there peaceful, sun-shimmering Milot, sprawled against the plain. There the spatulate valley flared out from the two mountain ranges, one of which I was ascending—the lush lowland that Christophe had completely cultivated to rustling cane in his reign (in one year alone his plantations produced ten million pounds of sugar . . . but that was when every man worked from sunrise to sunset with one hour off for breakfast—on location—and two for lunch and siesta). And there, against a fan of infinite azure, lay Cap Haïtien—in a penumbra of gold and green that melted into the sea.

Winding ever upward around the escarpment, the drama of what was before me kept growing. When was I going to see 'La Ferrière'? Then, all at once, three and a half kilometres beyond the point where Manga and the mule had betrayed me, I swung around the shoulder of the mountain . . .

#### The Citadel !

I was almost beneath the prow which rises one hundred and thirty feet from the crest of the slope, so steep that men and donkeys must climb in three-quarters of a circle to reach its base. They had told me that this extraordinary example of architecture had been designed so that the prow should point magnetic North. So high was the awesome pile that the clouds broke against it almost as though the Citadel were a giant ship ploughing her way through some Celestial sea. And behind this prow the façade rose, story after story, incredible, looming up against the sky. To me it was vastly more impressive than the Empire State Building. It was a feat of architecture and of physical construction without comparison in the Western world. The Panama Canal, the Morro Castle at the entrance to Havana Harbour, or the magnificent sea wall at Cartagena could not hold a candle to the Citadel. Here was a monument that rose from the highest peak of the North Haïtien range almost as though it were part of the mountain peak. Here, shouldering above me in the noon-day sun, was the most extravagant, bizarre, and absolutely fantastic construction ever created in the tortured chamber of a man's mind as a monument to his own ego. Dessalines,

the original Emperor of Haiti, conceived the idea, but it was left to Christophe to execute it, and it was under his insatiable drive that the Citadel took shape. And, oddly enough, it was a Haitien mulatto engineer named Henri Besse who designed this monstrosity with all its parapets, catwalks, dungeons, and secret chambers.

All of a sudden it wiped Christophe's slate clean: what mattered it that he had dubbed two of his Cabinet Ministers the Comte de Limonade and the Comte de Marmalade—what mattered the sophomoric pomp and circumstance of his court? Here was his everlasting and breath-taking monument. Here was, without doubt, the greatest monument to the oppressed black race ever conceived and executed by black hands. Here was his Citadel!

Stumbling along, drenched with sweat, hundreds of feet below that massive pile, I never felt so humble in my life. Before traversing that last zig-zag, finally to confront the proud Haitien sergeant standing with arms akimbo, blocking the entrance to the shrine made sacred by one man's dominance, I realized that the physical packing of three hundred and sixty-five massive bronze cannon, countless tons of cannon balls, storey after storey of masonry perfectly executed, could not possibly be as important to me as that first glimpse of the Citadel. Already I could picture the bats hanging in clusters in those dark dungeons, fluttering eerily up and out of deep, vertical pits. I could visualize the evening mists breaking against that prow so that the natives in the vast plain below might look up from their voodoo drums and see this everlasting monument imperishable, enormous, everlasting—a symbol so spectacular to their simple minds as to be almost mythical!

Christophe was mad—he must have been—else why would he select the highest and most inaccessible peak out of the entire range of mountains that rim the north coast of Haiti to build such a monstrosity?

I finally sold myself to the Sergeant. He spoke French fluently—I brokenly. Nevertheless I was able to convey to him the fact that I came to admire this magnificent monument

constructed perhaps by one of his own ancestors. He could interpret my sincerity, whether it was in my French or in my eyes. At once he conducted me through the dim, mouldy, subterranean passages strewn with sawdust.

He took me first to the great central parade-ground in the centre of the Citadel. He was a dramatist, my guide. He made me believe that he was showing me the most impressive features first. I knew he wasn't, but I was willing to believe, so when he took me to a little crypt slightly larger than a St. Bernard dog-house and told me that therein rested the bones of Christophe as he was exhumed from the lime-pit, I confess that I was deeply impressed.

"Is this all in the way of a monument that the people of Haiti can erect to the memory of a man who was sold in slavery and still achieved the position of the first King of Haiti?"

"What," he said to me in simple French, "could we do to commemorate the memory of Christophe comparable to what he has done himself?"

He flung out his hand in a wide gesture that encompassed the Citadel.

I gleaned a lot of statistics after that: the height of the walls measured from the tip of the almost vertical mountain crest ranged from eighty to one hundred and thirty feet. He pointed out that these walls were from twenty to thirty feet thick and that within the five or six storeys was room for ten thousand men. Peering down those mouldy, vertical shafts from above, I could see the smoke idly lifting upwards as some of the Sergeant's men cooked their noonday meal. But he was not content with telling me—he must show me. First he took me down a precipitous decline into the very depths of the Citadel, where he pointed out the enormous underground cistern that caught every drop of rain that swept across that proud mountain-top. It was dank down there—mouldy, foul-smelling, with a thick, green scum against the stone. It was dark—I dodged constantly to avoid the frightened bats as they flapped past me. The Sergeant had a flashlight with which he illuminated the dungeons, treasure chambers, powder magazines, and the long corridors where

the bronze cannon had been mounted to sweep the countryside.

What nonsense ! Those cannon might conceivably blast a labourer from his thatched hut, as I understand Christophe had done when his big, brass telescope revealed to him that some of his men were sleeping instead of working, but not even the armaments of to-day could adequately protect the dim, distant harbour. Such was my thought as I drew a bead from behind those cannon. But I kept my peace.

In keeping with his instinctive sense of the dramatic, the Sergeant conducted me from the very bowels of the Citadel up to its crest. I plodded behind him as he mounted stair after stair and storey after storey, ever upward. First he took me to a great courtyard in the extreme southern end, where I saw, neatly stacked and each in its own group, tons of rusty cannon balls. These he revealed with a shrug. Then, upward again, this time to the top, where he revealed with a much prouder gesture the vast interior plain that had once been intensely cultivated with sugar cane but which now was an endless sea of cactus and mangrove.

"Listen," he abjured.

I did. And as my ears became attuned, I could hear distant and ever more distant throbbing of the voodoo drums. Thousands of feet below, mile after mile, there came to my ears that steady, insistent boom, boom, boom. The sun was high. Heat waves lay heavily upon that lowland. By all rights, the natives should have been sprawled out in their grass-woven hammocks within the confines of their thatched huts. Yet, even then, and more so as the afternoon wore on, I heard that steady, never-ending drumming of callous black hands against taut drums—drums that I had been told were strung with the cured skins of virgin Haitien girls.

We were on the top at last—the top of 'La Ferrière'—empty and deserted for a hundred and sixteen years—ever since Christophe fell victim to the paralysis and lost his Kingdom by such an unimportant thing as falling head first beside his horse as he tried to mount to review his army in parade assembled. Now the guide took me on a catwalk

along that same parapet where once the Black King demonstrated his power over his men by marching a detachment of them across it and down to their certain death on the rocks hundreds of feet below, simply to show the French Ambassador how things were in Haiti. Carefully we picked our way past chimney tops, past the old roof of the hospital, finally to a narrow flight of steps leading still farther upward to the shell of a room that once was Christophe's chamber.

I stood in the embrasure of a glassless window and I looked down upon the prow of the Citadel; I looked down upon the endless zig-zag of the trail that led from the portals of 'La Ferrière' down the mountain-side and around the corner, eventually back to Sans Souci. They had told me that there was a secret passage from the Citadel to the palace seven kilometres below. But I knew this could not be so. Those drums in the valley told me that much. There is a mystery in the hands of the Haitiens at a drum that passes the word along. Look what happened to Christophe himself; less than eight hours after he had fallen on his face at the side of his horse in front of his men the word had passed through that vast inland plain: "*Le Roi est mort!*" Surely, if that were so, it would be impossible for his men to have excavated such a gigantic mass of dirt, as would be necessary, without the entire island being aware of it. Furthermore, had it been so, surely the King's princesses, wife, and faithful followers would have used it to carry his body to the Citadel instead of their heart-breaking trek in the moonlight over that precipitous mountain trail.

Did I say my Haitien guide had a sense of drama? Could it be otherwise, the way he demonstrated Christophe's bedroom to me as the last and final thing to see in the Citadel?

So I stood there at the window, the highest point of the Citadel, at the highest point of any mountain in Haiti within my vision. There to the north fanned the azure sea; there sprawled Cap Haitien, there spread out the vast plain between the two mountain ranges that marched down to the sea. All of a sudden I realized that Christophe had driven his men to the construction of this magnificent monument and had

himself spent tireless days and nights on the scaffold, not for the purpose of hiding gold, as many people think (after all, shortly before his death he had dispatched Sir Home Popham to London with six million dollars in gold to be deposited in the Bank of England in the name of Marie-Christophe, his wife), not as a gesture to the world that here was sanctuary for the slaves and sons of slaves—for the black people who had thrown down the gauntlet to Napoleon, but as a monument to his own ego mania ! That bedchamber at the very crest of the Citadel commanded such a magnificent and untrammelled view of Haiti that all one needed to do was march back and forth on that promenade and say :

“ Yonder lies my land. My ears hear the drums of my people. Here stand I, master of all that the human eye can encompass ! ”

That was Christophe's idea—it struck me so forcibly as I stood there that there was no question in my mind. Never have I felt such a deep source of admiration for a man ; never have I seen such a perfect and lasting monument erected by a man for himself (contrast this, for example, with the Taj Mahal, erected by a man for his love of a woman), never have I been privileged to personally examine so incongruous and incomprehensible a temple as that !

I was the first of our party to reach the Citadel. I was the only one to explore its depths and recesses with the Haitien Sergeant. And I was, by hours, the last to leave. Long, long after the rest of the party had threaded down that zig-zag and become lost to view, I stood there at Christophe's bed window, enthralled. Looking south, I could see crumbling remnants of Christophe's private palace—Le Ramier—named after his favourite bird—constructed at some little distance on the neighbouring hill slope. Earlier in the day I had carved my way with machete to inspect that ancient ruin. Looking northward, my eye encountered the three camel-like humps of mountain range that swept down to the sea—known to the Haitiens as Le Bonnet à l'Evêque (the Bishop's cap).

Such incidentals as the recently erected lightning rods strung along the Citadel did not interest me. Many of the



people thought that it must be quite a feat to string up a lightning rod across that tremendous face of masonry. But did not Christophe himself stand on the scaffold a century ago and with his own noble hands, working with no more than the full moon to illuminate his progress, set stone after stone in place? Such manifestations of tourist activity as names, initials, and platitudes which defamed the tiny cathedral in the Citadel failed to amuse me. Even the embossing on those bronze cannon dating back to 1741 left me cold. All I wanted, now that I felt that I had solved Christophe's secret, was to stand at his window far up on 'La Ferrière' and watch the twilight mists come scudding up from the bay to break softly against the great prow of his fortress. All I wanted was to stand there and feel, as he must have, like the Captain of a giant liner moving forward, ever forward, through a Celestial sea.

## *Fade-Out*

**T**HERE is no twilight in the tropics—only day and night; there is no dawn—only night and day. There is no adolescence there—only childhood and maturity. When it rains it pours—and when the sun beats down it's a glaring, stamping, metallic sunshine that saps the colour from the leaves and the red corpuscles from the blood. Nothing seems to be done in moderation—everything in excess.

You can stand on a street corner in Guatemala City and observe an ox-cart with solid wooden wheels disputing the right of way with a shiny new Cadillac limousine. You may look up from your paper in Puerto Cortes, Honduras, as the ubiquitous bugles blast, and you will see a detail of barefoot soldiers assembling the latest model machine-gun. Down in Panama you may stand in the middle of the street, astride a thin white line that marks the boundary between Cristobal and Colon. On the one side you will find civilization, well-kept lawns, cool, concrete homes shaded by royal palms, white linen, and clean-shaven faces. On the other side are the brothels and the night clubs, beer and blood in the gutter, shapeless clothing draped from shapeless bodies, lipstick and sweat and three days' growth of beard. In San José, Costa Rica, you will pass a chattering group of peasant coffee pickers whose long, full dresses and handwork blouses remind you somehow of Bavaria. Yet, strolling into the dim foyer of the Gran Hotel you find exquisitely gowned, perfectly groomed, and incredibly beautiful girls from the aristocracy who speak fluent English, French, and German and are as much at home in Paris spending their fathers' coffee money as they are in San José.

Million-dollar theatres are to be found in Salvador and Costa Rica, replete with ornate gold-leaf trim, plush drapes, horseshoe mezzanines, and all the fixin's—all the fixin's, that is, except an opera company.

Monuments, hand-hewn, with cuneiform symbols, still stand in the jungle after two thousand years. Yet, the setting sun casts almost as definite a shadow from a power plant to-day as it did from a mysterious symbol in the jungle, æons past.

Some thirty-five kinds of brandy grace the shelves of tropical bars—rare vintage importations from the sunny fields of France—Benedictine from the monasteries of the Trappists—whiskies from the heather highlands of Scotland. Yet, down the throats of the people run the rank, fiery fermentations of this year's crop of tropical sugar cane.

Tourists perspire uncertainly in the presence of the suave Orientals as the latter painlessly extract their money in exchange for mediocre merchandise. Not many centuries ago, over the same ground in Panama, stamped the invading pirate hordes bent on the same mission—and equally successful !

Far up in the wind-bitten fastness of Guatemala's mighty mountains, patient brown fingers weave beautiful garments, while at the steaming foot of that same range eager natives paw the pages of Montgomery-Ward's latest catalogue for something snappy in modern suitings—some double-breasted nifty in herring-bone and padded shoulders, braid-trimmed, and garnished with pearl buttons—including two pairs of pleated bell-bottom pants.

Well, the ship is at the jetty and her prow is headed north. Look for the last time at the lime-washed boles, the palms all noble against the flaming evening sun. Stand at the low sea wall and sniff the scent of the sea while the spray of the surf lightly flicks across your face. As the waves subside in seething confusion through the coral, watch the tiny land crabs scramble out in futile search for food and romance (not unlike our own desires, what ?). Listen as the smooth swell lifts through the pilings and your ship creaks plaintively at her berth and you

can hear the sob and suck of the rip tide as it laves the silver shore.

Suddenly it is dark. Ship lights prick through the mantle of the night and the surf gleams with phosphorescence in a giant crescent to the rim of the world. Monotonous and mournful comes the cadence of the sea.

Stand at the taffrail as the drum of the screw churns the blue-black water into dappled apple green and the sirens throaty blast reverberates through the dark mystery of the night. Man-made noises, these. But even above them, blotting out the shouting and confusion, comes that note of eternal sadness, the tremulous murmur of the tropic sea. Listen and you can hear :

“ The long-backed breakers croon  
Their endless ocean legends to the lazy, locked lagoon.”

This song of the southern sea, once heard, shall ever linger in your soul. The day will surely come when the sight of a tropical ship lifting her hull across the dim horizon will tear at your heart. Then the thresh of rain over jungle and the soft sweet wind in the palms will blend with the diapason of the sea and will irresistibly ring through your spirit again. Down once more, you'll be heading through the everlasting Gates of the Caribbean—back again to those Wild West Indies.

THE END



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